

Warwickshire Police and Crime Panel

Thursday 22 September 2022

Minutes

Attendance

Panel Members

Councillor Christopher Kettle (Chair) (Stratford-on-Avon District Council)
Councillor Barbara Brown (Vice Chair) (Warwickshire County Council)
Mr Andy Davis (Independent Member)
Councillor Ian Davison (Warwick District Council)
Councillor Jenny Fradgley (Warwickshire County Council)
Councillor Clare Golby (Nuneaton and Bedworth Borough Council)
Councillor John Holland (Warwickshire County Council)
Councillor Dave Humphreys (Warwickshire County Council)
Councillor Ray Jarvis (North Warwickshire Borough Council)
Councillor Bhagwant Singh Pandher (Warwickshire County Council)
Councillor Derek Poole (Rugby Borough Council)

Officers

John Cole, Senior Democratic Services Officer
Caroline Gutteridge, Delivery Lead – Commercial and Regulatory
Virginia Rennie, Strategy and Commissioning Manager (Strategic Finance)

Others Present

Jemima Busby, Assurance and Scrutiny Officer, OPCC
Councillor Bill Gifford
Helen Knee, Warwickshire Joint Audit and Standards Committee
Polly Reed, Chief Executive, OPCC
Philip Seccombe, Warwickshire Police and Crime Commissioner
Neil Tipton, Head of Media and Communications, OPCC

1. General

A minute's silence was held in remembrance of Her Majesty, Queen Elizabeth II.

The Chair welcomed attendees to the meeting, including Helen Knee, who was present on behalf of Warwickshire Joint Audit and Standards Committee.

(1) Apologies

Apologies were received from Mr Andrew Davies.

(2) Disclosures of Pecuniary and Non-Pecuniary Interests

There were none.

(3) Minutes of the Previous Meeting

The Chair requested an insertion to the minutes under Item 8 to state that the figures published by a national newspaper relating to burglary detection rates had been derived from the Police.uk website. He advised that he had consulted the website to verify that these figures were accurate.

This amendment was accepted by members of the Panel and the Police and Crime Commissioner. Subject to this amendment, the minutes were approved as an accurate record of the meeting.

There were no matters arising.

(4) Public Speaking

Councillor Bill Gifford was welcomed to the meeting and invited to put his question to the Police and Crime Commissioner.

Councillor Gifford highlighted the long waiting times experienced by callers contacting 101. He expressed support for the initiative to offset pressure on 101 services by making use of online resources. However, residents accessing Single Online Home had reported delays in obtaining a crime number after making a report to the website.

Councillor Gifford stated that this gave the unfortunate and incorrect impression that the Police were not interested in hearing from the public. This had led some to conclude that it was not worthwhile to report crimes, resulting in underreporting of crime. There was also concern that not all reported crimes were being logged by the system.

Councillor Gifford stated that it was clear that underreporting would lead to less information reaching the Police, and whilst the public may feel that crime is increasing, police figures may show the opposite. He emphasised that he was not seeking to criticise any police officers and expressed confidence in the work of the Leamington North Safer Neighbourhood Team.

Councillor Gifford asked if the Police would consider requesting that streetlights be turned back on in areas where several instances of crime had recently occurred.

The Commissioner thanked Councillor Gifford for his comments and stated that increased demand for the 999 Service had impacted on 101 response times. He stated that there had been a record high demand for 999 services in 2021. Figures for 2022 were on-track to exceed those of the previous year. This was a national issue, influenced by wider factors such as pressure on mental health services.

The Commissioner advised that Warwickshire Police had stepped in to accept 999 calls on behalf of other regional forces that were experiencing exceptionally high call demand or technical difficulties. This had impacted on 101 waiting times. He sought the Panel's view of

what constituted an acceptable waiting time for a 101 call.

The Commissioner advised that, at the last inspection, His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services (HMICFRS) had rated the capability of Warwickshire Police to record crime as 'good'. He advised that all reports made to Single Online Home were recorded and a target time of 48 hours had been set to acknowledge receipt of reports. It was concerning to learn that, in some instances, this target had not been met. He would raise the matter with the Chief Constable.

The Commissioner advised that the average waiting time for 101 calls was monitored on a weekly basis. Recent weeks had seen an average of between four and eight minutes. He accepted that this was too long; however, it was a consequence of very high demand. He stated that Warwickshire Police was exceeding the performance of most other forces in this area.

In response to the Chair, the Commissioner advised that the call abandonment rate was influenced by 'pocket calls', where 999 or 101 had been dialled by mistake, as well as by callers choosing to redial rather than wait during busy periods. Within the Force, there was a strong focus on reducing the number of abandoned calls. Following the meeting, he would provide an update to the Panel on the proportion of 101 calls that had been unanswered.

Polly Reed (Chief Executive, OPCC) advised that it was difficult to analyse the causes of abandoned 101 calls. It was not possible to discern whether calls had been terminated in favour of dialling 999; if a call had been ended due to the matter being resolved (for example, attendance at the incident by police officers); or if calls had been abandoned for other reasons.

In response to Councillor Davison, the Commissioner advised that, nationally, infrastructure for 999 and 101 calls was provided by BT; the potential to introduce measures that offered reassurance to those waiting for a response would depend upon BT's ability to deliver this service. He acknowledged that technological solutions, such as an automated call-back facility, could help to ease pressure.

The Commissioner stated that he would continue to hold the Force to account for delivery of 101 services. A 'Gold Group' scrutiny review was underway to identify how improvements could be made. It was likely that increased resourcing of the Operations Control Centre (OCC) would be required to keep up with rising demand.

In response to Councillor Jarvis, the Commissioner asked that details of callers being kept waiting for an exceptionally long period of time be forwarded to his Office to enable the matter to be raised with the Chief Constable. He stated that a high number of calls were experienced in instances where there was an issue of widespread community concern.

The Commissioner advised that Warwickshire County Council held responsibility for streetlighting. Warwickshire Police was a consultee and occasionally recommended that streetlights be turned on at specific locations. However, this was an operational decision.

In conclusion, the Commissioner stated that 101 call volume and performance data was monitored and scrutinised on a weekly basis; regular visits to the OCC were made to develop

an understanding of the challenges affecting service delivery; attendance of meetings of the OCC Public Contact Organisation ensured that residents' concerns could be acted upon; and the issues affecting 101 performance were regularly reviewed at Governance and Performance Board (GPB) meetings (where it had been treated as a 'spotlight subject' in July 2022). He stated that work to progress the Empower Programme would focus on the capacity and capability of the OCC. Additionally, the Gold Group Review would enable improvements to be made. He emphasised that 999 calls were being responded to promptly.

2. Report of the Police and Crime Commissioner

In response to Councillor Poole, the Commissioner advised that the Police Degree Programme was a national initiative. Warwickshire Police had entered an agreement with Staffordshire University to deliver the Programme. He stated that new recruits were allocated patrol and response duties, providing a good foundation prior to choosing a specialism. The Detective Constable Degree Holder Entry Programme had been established to address the national shortfall in the number of detective constables, enabling degree holders to join the organisation at this level.

The Commissioner advised that practical work formed an integral element of the Programme. Student officers were given the opportunity to join duty shifts. He expressed his support for this approach, stating that he had advocated for an improved balance between academic and practical work. However, he emphasised the complexity of modern policing which required a detailed understanding of IT systems and databases.

Polly Reed (Chief Executive, OPCC) advised that candidates were required to pass a standard interview to be accepted as student officers. There were assessment points throughout the duration of the course where students could either pass or fail. As with other degree programmes, students were offered the opportunity to select different modules focusing on specific areas. She advised that a good standard of pastoral support was provided throughout the course. Once sufficient progress had been made, student officers could be granted independent patrol status.

In response to the Chair, Polly Reed advised that student officers were subject to a probationary period which was likely to extend beyond completion of the course. She offered to clarify these details following the meeting.

The Commissioner highlighted that the Degree Programme provided police officers with an accredited qualification. Previously, they had not been offered this opportunity.

In response to the Chair, the Commissioner advised that the initial intake of student officers would soon graduate. He stated that an increased proportion of less experienced officers was an inevitable consequence of the drive to expand the Force. Effective training and mentoring would support new officers' development.

The Chair requested that future reports to the Panel continue to provide a breakdown of levels of experience within the Force, including the proportion of recently graduated officers who were less than one year into their posts.

In response to Councillor Golby, the Commissioner advised that it would be possible to track the abstraction rate of recently graduated officers in the years ahead. At present, an average of

approximately eight officers left the Force each month, either to retire or, less commonly, to transfer to another force. He stated that that tuition fees were paid for by the Force. This was consistent with arrangements elsewhere and helped to attract capable individuals.

The Commissioner advised that online learning resources enabled student officers to maximise the amount of time spent on duty. It was proposed that the proportion of time dedicated to academic study be revised to around 60%, allowing increased direct experience of policing.

In response to the Chair, the Commissioner advised that the recruitment policy was supported by a robust retention policy focusing on career development. However, graduates from the Degree Programme were not obliged to repay tuition fees if they chose to leave the organisation. A clawback provision was not permitted under the terms of the national scheme.

Andy Davis highlighted the recently published findings of His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services (HMICFRS) following inspections of Northumbria Police, Staffordshire Police and the Metropolitan Police Service which highlighted the challenges associated with a high proportion of inexperienced officers. He asked what learning could be derived from the Inspectorate's conclusions.

The Commissioner advised that an inspection by HMICFRS of Warwickshire Police would commence in the coming weeks. He stated that HMICFRS provided an independent view of the Force's performance, enabling a focus on specific areas where more attention was required. It was likely that HMICFRS would give attention to levels of experience within the Force. In common with forces elsewhere, the proportion of less experienced officers had increased in Warwickshire as an inevitable consequence of enlarging the Force.

Polly Reed advised that the OPCC regularly monitored issues raised by HMICFRS and other national agencies to inform approaches to holding to account activities, including selection of 'spotlight subjects' at Governance and Performance Board (GPB) meetings with the Chief Constable. She emphasised that the deployment of new officers would be a managed process, adding that 'inexperience' was a relative term; there would be varying levels of experience across academic cycles.

The Chair suggested that it would be helpful for the Panel to periodically receive a breakdown of levels of experience across the Force, monitoring the progress made by student officers across successive intakes.

In response to the Chair, the Commissioner advised that the 'Action Taken on Burglary' data presented within the report drew upon various measures, including detection rates. He stated that there were multiple reasons for the low rate of positive outcomes. However, the present rate was unacceptably low. He reported that a significant proportion of burglaries were perpetrated by a small number of repeat offenders, including organised crime groups. These groups would continue to be targeted, making use of forensic and evidential links that could lead to prosecution. However, in many instances, burglaries left limited evidence.

The Commissioner advised that priority was given to invasive crimes, such as home break-ins, which had the worst impact on victims. He emphasised that, nationally, Warwickshire Police's response to burglary was ranked within the upper quartile. He added that a focus on prevention had brought down the number of burglary offences.

The Chair expressed support for the effectiveness of prevention measures; however, there was limited assurance that a reduction in the number of burglary offences had led to an improved rate of detection.

There was discussion of the causes of low detection rates, allocation of police resources, and the role of Safer Neighbourhood Teams to respond to incidents of theft and anti-social behaviour. The Commissioner requested that members provide details of specific incidents which he would raise with the Chief Constable.

The Commissioner advised that good progress had been made to introduce a Performance Framework to monitor delivery of the objectives and success measures of the Police and Crime Plan 2021 – 2025. An update would be provided at the next meeting of Panel. The Planning and Performance Working Group would also provide a view on the development of this initiative.

Councillor Davison expressed support for the 'Warwickshire Road Victims Need Assessment' undertaken by Staffordshire University. He asked the Commissioner to clarify how this initiative would contribute to the objective to "Keep People Safe and Reduce Harm".

The Commissioner advised that the success of initiatives to improve road safety were difficult to measure, the Warwickshire Road Victims Need Assessment provided a means to target funding to the areas where it would have the greatest impact. He expressed confidence in the work of the Warwickshire Road Safety Partnership, which brought stakeholder organisations together to reduce harm; and the Independent Road Traffic Victim Advocate scheme, which provided support to families bereaved by road traffic collisions.

In response to Councillor Davison, the Commissioner advised that measures were in place to promote a cultural change in attitudes to road safety by means of engagement with schools, driving instructors, and others. Videos and promotional resources had been produced to raise awareness of risks. These measures would be integral to achieving the targeted 50% reduction in the number of fatalities on Warwickshire roads by 2050.

In response to Councillor Poole, the Commissioner advised that delivery of the key priority to "strengthen communities" could be achieved by an increased focus by the Force on crime prevention, coupled with enhanced partnership working. For example, by promoting increased engagement by partnership organisations with Community Safety Partnerships (CSPs).

Councillor Poole underlined the importance of the role of CSPs, stating that Rugby CSP was seeking to improve partnership working arrangements and secure the engagement of stakeholders across the public sector.

Councillor Poole left the meeting at 15:55.

In response to the Councillor Fradgley, the Commissioner advised that residents' concerns had been central to development of the Empower Programme, leading to measures to support the work of Safer Neighbourhood Teams as well as dedicated teams to address rape and serious sexual offences and domestic abuse. He stated that decentralisation of the Force into three separate commands for the north, south, and east of the County would lead to improved communication with residents and councillors.

There was discussion of efficiencies emerging from investment in ICT across the Force. The Commissioner stated that he would continue to seek assurances that investment had led to measurable efficiencies.

In response to Andy Davis, the Commissioner advised that the severity of the backlog of cases waiting to be progressed to courts had been exacerbated by industrial action by barristers. He reported that the Ministry of Justice had provided data to provide a clearer idea of the timescale for resolution of the backlog. He emphasised the impact that delays would have on policing and victims of crime. However, the return of Magistrates Courts to Warwickshire in October 2022 would lead to improved justice outcomes. As Chair of the Local Criminal Justice Board (LCJB), he would facilitate engagement across partnership organisations to seek an improvement.

In response to the Chair, the Commissioner provided an outline of holding to account activities between his Office and the Chief Constable, including monthly GPB meetings as well as weekly meetings to ensure that issues could be addressed promptly. Minutes of the GPB meetings were published on-line. He stated that topics for scrutiny took account of concerns raised by residents, businesses, and councillors. It was necessary to exercise judgement to prioritise issues, with a focus on the safety of Warwickshire residents and communities.

In response to the Chair, the Commissioner advised that he had acted on the Panel's recommendation that the induction programme for the Deputy Police and Crime Commissioner (DPCC) give specific attention to finance and budget management. Training had been provided by the Treasurer of the OPCC, and the DPCC regularly attended and contributed to budget meetings.

3. Public Engagement and Consultation

The Police and Crime Commissioner introduced the Communication and Engagement Strategy 2022 – 2025 which set out approaches for engagement with communities and key stakeholders across the County as well as on a regional and national level.

Neil Tipton (Head of Media and Communications, OPCC) advised that the Strategy sought to build upon existing principles whilst broadening engagement activities. He advised that some activities had been delayed during the period of national mourning. However, plans were in place to make use of opportunities for engagement with residents at locations across the County. This included seeking a view on public priorities for policing and community safety to inform development of the Policing Budget for 2023/24.

Neil Tipton advised that over 500 responses had been received since the launch of the Budget Consultation. This augured well for a strong public response. He stated that the questionnaire, which had been devised with the Panel's input, would support the Commissioner's understanding of public sentiment on a wide range of topics. He advised that the Consultation would be widely promoted and targeted to underrepresented groups and communities. He encouraged Panel members to promote the Consultation. A pack containing promotional resources would be shared with members following the meeting.

In response to Andy Davis, Neil Tipton advised that it was not proposed to establish a Citizens' Panel. It had been decided that resources could be better used by taking advantage of existing networks, including the prospect of engagement with Warwickshire County Council's Residents' Panel.

In response to the Chair, Neil Tipton advised that engagement with commissioned services, such as victim support groups, provided a means to reach out to individuals who would otherwise be disinclined to participate in the survey.

There was discussion of the meeting held between the Panel and the OPCC on 24 August 2022 to review the draft Budget Consultation questionnaire. Members had suggested amendments to the proposed survey questions; a second meeting had been proposed but not pursued by the OPCC.

The Commissioner stated that he had resolved to approve the second draft of the Questionnaire which incorporated suggestions made by the Panel. He apologised that the commitment to hold a second meeting had been overlooked. However, he emphasised the urgent need to finalise the document to ensure that engagement opportunities were not missed. He thanked members for their input.

Councillor Davison left the meeting at 16:36.

4. Home Office Grant and Panel Expenditure 2021/22

The Chair introduced the report which provided a summary of Panel expenditure within the 2021/22 financial year and details of the annual grant received from the Home Office to meet the costs of maintaining and supporting the Panel.

The Panel noted the summary of expenditure and grant claim to the Home Office for the 2021/22 financial year.

5. Issues Raised by Community Safety Partnerships

Prior to the meeting, Community Safety Partnerships (CSPs) had been contacted to facilitate an opportunity to escalate any concerns raised by residents that had high-level, strategic implications for discussion at the meeting.

Safer South Warwickshire Community Safety Partnership had responded to ask that a view be sought from the Police and Crime Commissioner in respect of a perceived lack of police visibility and challenges associated with the response of the Force to county lines and anti-social behaviour.

The Commissioner advised that, in recent months, police visibility had been affected by the requirement to divert officers to the protests at Kingsbury Oil Terminal, the Commonwealth Games, and to London for the Royal Funeral. In these circumstances, it was up to the Force to decide how it could maintain effective patrol teams with fewer officers. He added that target attendance times had been met during the affected periods.

The Commissioner stated that analysis of recent data showed a reduction in anti-social behaviour in South Warwickshire. He advised that the OPCC would be represented at each of the upcoming meetings of CSPs, enabling an opportunity to explore the issues raised in more detail. He would respond to the points made by Safer South Warwickshire CSP in writing.

6. Work Programme

The Panel noted the Work Programme.

7. Dates of Meetings

The Panel noted the dates of the future meetings.

8. Any Urgent Items

There were none.

9. 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 7 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972.

10. Complaints

There were none.

The meeting rose at 17:00.

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Chair