

Warwickshire Police and Crime Panel

Monday 3 February 2025

Minutes

Attendance

Committee Members

Andy Davis (Chair), Independent Member
Councillor Dave Humphreys (Vice-Chair), Warwickshire County Council
Andrew Davies, Independent Member
Councillor Claire Edwards, Rugby Borough Council
Councillor Jenny Fradgley, Warwickshire County Council
Councillor Natalie Gist, Stratford-on-Avon District Council
Councillor Bhagwant Singh Pandher, Warwickshire County Council
Councillor Jill Simpson-Vince, Warwickshire County Council
Councillor Jim Sinnott, Warwick District Council

Officers

Amy Bridgewater-Carnall, Senior Democratic Services Officer
Caroline Gutteridge, Legal Manager Commercial & Regulatory
Lucy Adams, Team Lead Senior Solicitor Planning & Litigation
Andrew Harper, Head of Strategic Finance

Others Present

Philip Seccombe, Warwickshire Police and Crime Commissioner
Emma Daniell, Deputy Warwickshire Police and Crime Commissioner
Polly Reed, Chief Executive, Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner
Sara Ansell, Head of Finance, Office of the Police and Crime Panel

1. General

The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting and outlined the agenda for the meeting.

The Chair referred to one of the reports on the agenda, Recruitment of Independent Person, advising that he wished to clarify the process, following a number of claims made by interested parties, particularly on social media.

Andy Davis explained that the recruitment process was carried out by a sub-group of the Warwickshire Police and Crime Panel and not by the Leader of the Council. He reiterated that at no time was he interviewed or appointed by any individual related to any person present at the meeting. He concluded that he had completed two terms as Independent Member on the Panel and was stepping down as per LGA guidance and to pursue other interests.

(1) Apologies

Apologies were received from North Warwickshire Borough Councillor Tim Jenkins.

(2) Disclosures of Pecuniary and Non-Pecuniary Interests

There were none.

(3) Minutes of the Previous Meeting

The minutes of the Police and Crime Panel meeting held on 20 January 2025 were agreed and signed by the Chair as a correct record.

The Chair asked if it would be possible for the item on the Independent Review Action Plan could be brought forward to the March 2025 meeting. In response, the Chief Executive of the OPCC, Polly Reed, advised that the Force had been asked to submit their initial report on progress in April, therefore the June 2025 meeting would be the first opportunity to share any update with the Panel.

(4) Public Speaking

There was none.

2. Budget Report 2025/26

The 2025/26 Budget report was introduced by the Commissioner, Philip Seccombe who, building on the information contained in the papers, outlined the key points.

He explained that his report requested support for a £14.00 increase (4.83%) to the Council Tax rate for a Band D property, which equated to approximately 27p per week. He gave assurance that the proposal took steps to maintain all existing services and deliver improvements. The Commissioner advised that his office had listened to residents and gave an overview of the communications undertaken, resulting in a second survey taking place throughout December and January. The survey had demonstrated that 60% of residents were in favour of the maximum increase, with over half of that number being willing to pay more.

The Panel were advised that the government funding settlement was provided on the basis that PCC's would apply the maximum uplift in the precept. Warwickshire remained one of the areas in receipt of the lowest level of grant per head of the population and the Commissioner accepted that this resulted in the burden falling increasingly on the council tax payer. In addition, he highlighted the need to find savings of £2.2 million, £1.2 million of which had already been found. This would result in the Chief Constable needing to find an additional £1 million worth of savings, a prospect that he felt was attainable if challenging.

The Commissioner was confident that the measures outlined in the report would not impact on services in Warwickshire and the OPCC had demonstrated good financial management.

The Panel noted the provision of additional Home Office Neighbourhood Policing Grant, which had been notified on Friday 31 January, after publication of the budget papers. The increase in grant

had been doubled totalling almost £1.4 million for Warwickshire, and the suggestion was that the additional amount would be held in reserves until further information relating to the terms and conditions of the grant had been received. The Commissioner committed to reporting back to the Panel to advise how the additional money would be spent. He hoped this would provide a number of benefits to services including an increase in officer numbers, enhancing police visibility and engagement and enabling fast and efficient responses to calls.

The Commissioner highlighted those areas of concern for policing including the escalation of business and retail crime. Other key areas of support included the ability to continue with targeted patrols to tackle anti-social behaviour, maintaining specialist units such as support for domestic abuse victims, rape victims and those affected by burglary, vehicle crime and theft. However, all of these support services would be at risk without adequate funding.

The Commissioner concluded by encouraging the Panel to support the recommendations in the report.

Councillor Sinnott welcomed the commitment to strengthen police officer numbers, noting that Warwickshire remained in the lower quartile of officers per 100 residents. He raised a concern relating to savings, acknowledging that whilst £1.2 million of savings had already been identified there was a need to find a further £2.5 million in future years.

In response, the Commissioner agreed that the savings requirements were challenging, however, the Chief Constable had assured him that the £1 million savings remaining for 2025/26 would be achieved without any staff redundancies or a reduction in officer numbers.

The Commissioner referred back to the commitments he had made in his manifesto when first appointed in relation to increased officer numbers and the funding made available for training. He gave an overview of the costs involved in recruiting, appointing and training individual officers. Whilst noting that the finances were challenging, the Commissioner reiterated the need for the government to revisit the funding formula.

The Chair also enquired where the additional £1 million savings would be sought from. He was advised that the Chief Constable was yet to provide precise detail to the Commissioner but officers had given assurances that the savings were attainable.

Independent Member, Andrew Davies, asked for clarification on the increase of opt out rates for pensions within the Force, which he felt may impact on retention rates in the future. In response, the Commissioner recognised that this was not a positive move for some individuals in the long term but it was difficult to predict how many incoming recruits would opt out.

Sara Ansell, Treasurer of the OPCC, outlined the percentage increase of those opting out in recent times and the subsequent saving per officer. She advised that this was a pattern being seen nationally, with Warwickshire not being the exception. However, it was noted this was a personal decision with re-enrolment required every three years. The Panel acknowledged that this may be reflection of the cost of living crisis.

Councillor Jill Simpson-Vince queried the costs related to the Force's fleet of vehicles and the mitigation measures to manage the imminent road tax changes and replacement of petrol or diesel cars to hybrid or electric vehicles. She was mindful that many police vehicles needed to be high

powered in order to carry out their duties and queried if the amount detailed in the medium term budget was robust enough. Officers confirmed that police cars were exempt from road tax, with Warwickshire holding a fleet of approximately 400 vehicles. There were maintenance programmes in place, however, they were flexible to take into account driving style and potential collisions. The Commissioner referred to a number of electric vehicles being piloted in neighbourhood teams and was conscious that carbon emissions needed to be considered. He hoped to be able to identify more pilots and trials of greener vehicles in the future.

Sara Ansell stated that the cost pressures were recognised and referred to in the report. There were plans to look at the type of vehicles using analytical data with some new technology being added to cars. Whilst it was an area of some cost pressure, the OPCC hoped to make more informed decisions once further data had been received.

The Chair queried the uplift in council tax base figures in relation to the forecast population growth in Warwickshire, as he felt that 2% was quite ambitious and higher than the past few years. The Panel noted that Warwick District Council had made a small amendment to the estimated council tax base figure included in the report, resulting in a final combined council tax base growth figure of 1.7% which OPCC officers were reasonably comfortable with.

The reliance on income from running the contractual vetting service was discussed with Andrew Davies asking the Commissioner if he was concerned the Force was becoming more reliant on it. The Commissioner applauded the service with Warwickshire being the only accredited Force for contractual vetting in the country and recognised the number of officers employed in that team. He advised that half of the surplus received was used for capital projects and the reserve was designed to offset any risk, should the vetting service not continue.

Councillor Dave Humphreys asked a question about the additional costs incurred from exceptional incidents, such as the events at Kingsbury Oil Depot last year. He queried if there was a reserve available that could be used. The Commissioner agreed that exceptional incidents incurred costs through the reliance on the use of resource from police forces outside Warwickshire and the cost of overtime for officers and PCSOs. A record of all costs was kept, however, the threshold for claiming back funds from the Home Office was not met following the Kingsbury Oil Depot and had to be covered by the force. A sum of money was kept back in reserves and planning was put in place for upcoming events, where possible, however due to the nature of many of these incidents, it was not always possible.

The Chair referred to table 7 on page 38 of the report, which detailed the Medium-Term Financial Plan and included increased payments for injury, pensions and ill health. Sara Ansell advised that the 2025/26 figure was higher as a reflection of the pay award and National Insurance increases and had therefore not been anticipated for future years. In addition, an IT contract previously provided by an external provider had now been brought in house, resulting in additional salaries being taken into account for 2025/26.

The reference in the table to abnormal loads was discussed, the income from which was as a result of private businesses paying the Force to escort the vehicle through Warwickshire. The abnormal load movements had increased in the area as a result of the development of HS2, however, the costs forecast last year did not reach the levels anticipated. Officers had therefore chosen to adjust the figure for this year to reflect the timelines and abnormal works schedule expected with HS2.

Councillor Sinnott spoke about the issues that residents raised concerns about, such as anti-social behaviour and the 101 Call service response times. He asked if the Commissioner would be able to provide evidence of how the additional 4.83% in the precept would provide better service for money. In response, the Commissioner reminded Panel members on the Planning and Performance Working Group of the Key Performance Indicators they had scrutinised previously and welcomed further analysis of these. In addition, the Commissioner held the Chief Constable to account and would be monitoring improvements. He referred to the increased anti-social behaviour patrols brought about as part of Operation Resolve in key areas. As yet, he was not certain if the Chief Constable would choose to put more resource into strengthening numbers of officers and providing training in this area. He also highlighted the turnover of staff numbers in the control room, which was often a starting point for officers joining the force.

Councillor Sinnott welcomed the opportunity to scrutinise improvement data in the working group.

Councillor Natalie Gist commented on the government finance being provided and was keen to see the detail of the terms and conditions once it was available. The Commissioner supported the comments and agreed that the conditions specified were not always easy to satisfy, however, he had not received any indication on when this detail may arrive.

Councillor Claire Edwards referred to the potential of new policing legislation being brought out and asked if any of the additional savings required would come from the OPCC itself. The Commissioner reiterated that £1.2 million had already been identified, with the remainder sitting with the Chief Constable to decide. The OPCC had seen similar financial challenges as other local authorities, with some grants being frozen as a result of increases in commissioned costs.

In relation to commissioned services, the Panel recognised that the national insurance increases had impacted on their costs and would affect some more than others. The Commissioner advised that a number of groups had reached out to the OPCC for advice and, whilst there was no additional funding to offer them, officers were working with them to identify areas of savings to avoid frontline user impact.

The Chair thanked the Commissioner and his team for responding to the comments raised and the Panel agreed that there was a role for the Planning and Performance Working Group to monitor improvements over the next year.

It was therefore proposed by Councillor Dave Humphreys, seconded by Councillor Jim Sinnott, and unanimously agreed to support the Budget Precept for 2025/26.

Resolved that the Budget Precept for 25/26 be supported and the Commissioner written to highlighting a number of recommendations.

3. Recruitment of New Independent Member to the Police and Crime Panel

The Panel received a report requesting approval to commence the recruitment process for a new Independent Member to the Police and Crime Panel. Legislation required that the Police and Crime Panel ("the Panel") membership include two independent (non-councillor) co-opted members.

The term of office of one of the current independent members, Mr Andy Davis, was due to expire on 17 March 2025 and he had indicated his intention to step down after a tenure of two four-year terms.

In order to carry out the process detailed in the report, the Panel were asked to appoint three members to a sub-group which would shortlist applications, carry out interviews and recommend a suitable candidate to the Panel for approval.

It was agreed that Councillors Claire Edwards, Jenny Fradgley and Jim Sinnott would be appointed to the Sub-Group.

Members noted the approximate timeline detailed in the report and acknowledged that this may be impacted slightly on any Local Government reorganisation decision or County elections in the future.

The Chair hoped that the recruitment process would generate a lot of interest as he had found his time on the Panel to be informative and very interesting.

Resolved that the Warwickshire Police and Crime Panel

- 1) notes that the Chair of the Panel, Mr Andy Davis, intends to step down as a serving member of the Panel when his current term of office comes to an end;
- 2) agrees to commence a recruitment exercise for a new co-opted independent member of the Warwickshire Police and Crime Panel; and
- 3) appoints a cross-party selection panel to oversee the recruitment process for a new independent co-opted member, and confirms membership as Councillors Claire Edwards, Jenny Fradgley and Jim Sinnott.

4. Work Programme

The Panel received the work programme detailing the reports due for consideration at future meetings.

It had been agreed earlier in the meeting that an update on the Delivery Plan following the Independent Review would be received in at the June 2025 meeting.

The Chair proposed adding an item on Devolution at an appropriate point in the future. Details in the Devolution White Paper indicated that there would be changes to policing, however, a decision on local government reform was expected in the next week.

Councillor Fradgley raised the matter of Community Speed Watch, asking if this could be added to the work programme to ensure it did not get lost. The Commissioner advised that he had asked the Force to update him on policy and how it works and hoped an officer would attend a future Holding to Account meeting. This would be reported back to the Panel.

5. Dates of Meetings

The dates of future Panel meetings were noted.

6. Any Urgent Items

The Chair raised the appointment of a Panel member to the Planning and Performance Working Group, asking for a volunteer to fill the existing vacancy. Councillor Claire Edwards put herself forwards and was advised that the Support Officer would be in contact with future meeting dates and availability requests.

Resolved that Councillor Claire Edwards be appointed to the Planning and Performance Working Group.

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

8. Complaints

The Chief Executive of the OPCC confirmed that there were no complaints to be reported at this time.

The meeting rose at 3.00pm

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Chair