

# Devon and Cornwall Police and Crime Panel

**Friday 2 February 2024**

**PRESENT:**

Councillor Towill in the Chair.

Councillor Haydon Vice Chair.

Councillors Alvey, Aspinall, Chopak, Croad, Ewings, Hackett, Loudoun, Thomas, Toms, Tyerman, Worth and Wright.

Apologies for absence: Councillors Goodman-Bradbury, Kennedy, Leaver, and Penberthy.

Also in attendance: Nicola Allen (Treasurer/Chief Finance Officer), Alison Hernandez (Devon, Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly Police and Crime Commissioner), Frances Hughes (Chief Executive Officer), Ross Jago (Head of Governance, Performance and Risk, Plymouth City Council) Felicity Ridgway (Director of Operations), and Unity Stuart (Executive Office Manager)

The meeting started at 10.30am and finished at 1.10pm.

*Note: At a future meeting, the Panel will consider the accuracy of these draft minutes, so they may be subject to change. Please check the minutes of that meeting to confirm whether these minutes have been amended.*

34. **Minutes**

The minutes from the meeting held on 24 November 2023 were agreed as an accurate record.

35. **Declarations of Interest**

There were no declarations of interest.

36. **Public Questions**

Question was submitted by Peter Snow	
<b>Question:</b> How does the panel show accountability for the actions of the police and its commissioner?	<b>Response:</b> The Panel, established under the Police Reform and Social Responsibility Act 2011 publicly scrutinises the Police and Crime Commissioner who holds the Chief Constable to account for the performance of the Police. The Panel reviews the Police and Crime plan, Annual report and holds confirmation hearings. Additionally the Panel assesses proposed Chief

	<p>Constable appointments and removals, precept levels and complaints against the Commissioner. During meetings, the Panel receives a scorecard on Police force performance with a number of key indicators which can then be scrutinised.</p> <p>Panel members request areas for consideration to scrutinise at future meetings of the Panel at every meeting, which is then taken forward by the Chair and Vice-Chair of the Panel.</p> <p>Finally, since the publication of the PEEL inspection of the force, the Panel have reviewed all area's that were rated inadequate to ensure the Commissioner and the force were ensuring continued improvements. The Panel had and continues to receive updates of this progress within the Commissioners update reports.</p>
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37. **Action Log**

The Committee agreed to note the report.

38. **Proposed Precept, Budget and Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS)**

Alison Hernandez (Devon and Cornwall Police and Crime Commissioner) introduced the item and highlighted the following points:

- a) Public contact management of sexual and violent offenders in communities and crime recording had improved since 2022;
- b) Public confidence in national policing was at an all-time low for various reasons including funding not being visible to the public, delays in the judicial system and low conviction rates for crimes such as shoplifting;
- c) Police officers for Devon, Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly were at their highest historically with 3610 in employment;
- d) The proposed precept increase of 4.95% would be equivalent to £12.94 for a Band D property;
- e) There would be savings and efficiencies of £5.4 million in the assumptive budget;
- f) Operation Ragwort would be the next push in the region and would tackle organised criminals in rural communities who steal animals and

property;

- g) £1.5 million of funding would be received to tackle anti-social behaviour;
- h) The number of Police Enquiry Offices had reached 28, an increase of 18 since the Commissioner came to office;
- i) Victim focused crime had increased by 11.9% since 2019 and levels of reported violence had exceeded pre-pandemic levels;
- j) An additional £1.257 million had been invested for tackling violence in Devon and Cornwall.

Nicola Allen (Treasurer/Chief Finance Officer) added:

- k) Assumed versus Actual for 2023/24:
  - i) Assumed: Grant levels per CRS and £10 council tax flexibility, Actual: Grant levels remained, up to £13 council tax flexibility for 2024/25;
  - ii) Assumed: 2% pay award, Actual: Pay award average of 7%;
  - iii) Assumed: Police Officer pension contribution of 31%, Actual: Contribution rate increased to 35.5%;
- l) Additional funding of £4.3 million had been included in the Provisional Settlement for 2024/25;
- m) Budget assumptions for 2024/25 and beyond would include: Pay awards at 3%, police officer pension contributions of 35.3% which would increase by 4.3% and no capital grant funding;
- n) The budget would potentially increase by £22.1 million;
- o) Staffing equated to 85% of the overall budget;
- p) Financial Risks and Resilience included: increasing trend in the public sector in the number of Section 114 notices being issued, the economic impact of inflation (assumed used 3.9%) and pay award (assumed used 3%), a review of the funding formula, the maintenance of police officer levels, the increased levels of specific grant and the long term impact on funding levels;
- q) General Reserves would be used to mitigate unexpected costs, and consumed 4% of the net revenue budget which was within the recommended limits of the Reserve Strategy;
- r) The final element for mitigating unexpected costs would be transparent decision making, ensuring decisions were published to ensure good governance and processes. This included internal and external audits alongside an independent audit committee;

- s) Inflation had reduced since the peak in October 2022 from 11.1% to 3.9% in November 2023, and this figure was used to plan the budget;
- t) There was no expectation to have to externally borrow any money until 2025/26;
- u) The upcoming general election could affect the ability to achieve multi-year funding and this meant the budget was prudent;
- v) Due to inflation the following assumptions had been made: Electricity and fuels costs would increase by 3%, construction would increase by 3% and the pay award would also increase by 3%;
- w) Council tax base had increased by 1.21% which was above the national average of 0.7%;
- x) The net surplus was £1.4 million which was below the expected £1.8 million;
- y) The Chargeable Dwellings for council tax had not changed significantly from 2022/23;
- z) The Reserve Strategy was reviewed by an independent audit committee and the Police Resources Board annually alongside the Treasure Management Strategy and the Capital Strategy as they were all intrinsically linked;
- aa) Partnership funding was ring-fenced;
- bb) Budget requirement for 2024/25 was £406.5 million;
- cc) Specific and ring-fenced grants increased by £14.5 million.

In response to questions, it was explained:

- dd) There were more police staff in 2023 than before 500 staff were cut in 2017;
- ee) There were tight controls around vacancy managements in order to drive savings within the budget;
- ff) Half a million pounds had been invested into the management of public complaints;
- gg) Second Home Tax had not been built in to the Mid-Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) at the time;
- hh) The five key 'planks' for running an effective and efficient police force were: uplift, robust and sustainable MTFS, organisational purpose,

- governance for decision making and sustainability;
- ii) There would be an increase of 24 posts for neighbourhood policing before the end of May 2024;
  - jj) Improvement Reserves would be used to fund Capital Schemes coming to fruition;
  - kk) Although there were national talks of tax cuts, no such cuts were apparent within Local Government;
  - ll) Devon, Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly had generated just over 5% interest on all investments;
  - mm) All staff at the Office of Police and Crime Commissioner (OPCC) fell under the Local Government Pension Scheme;
  - nn) A governance body would potentially be set up to oversee where money was spent in Plymouth;
  - oo) Call handling wait times were fluctuating from between 19 minutes in December to 10 minutes in January, both of which were an improvement on the previous 40 minutes;
  - pp) A head of public contact had been recently recruited;
  - qq) 62% of public Agree or Strongly Agree that more money should be spent on opening more police stations;
  - rr) The Commissioner hoped seasonal changes and tourism would be included in the next national Comprehensive Spending Review in the way of additional summer funding;
  - ss) Although the Government accepted the summer and rural challenges faced in the South West, there was still a stalemate regarding funding to aid with this issue;
  - tt) Abandonment rates for 101 would be cascaded out to members as a matter of urgency;
  - uu) Call-back function had improved abandonment rates for 101 services;
  - vv) Over half a million pounds had been invested into tackling youth violence;
  - ww) Staff in customer facing police stations were not answering 101 calls when quiet, as there was a dedicated staff for this service;
  - xx) The average waiting time for an email response from 101 was 24 hours, which was significantly reduced from the previous 10 days;

- yy) The Commissioner recommended Councillors to join the Councillor Advocate Scheme to build relationships with the local teams and Inspector.

The Committee agreed to accept the council tax precept proposal and not exercise a veto and to ask the Commissioner to consider potential governance arrangements to ensure political oversight on the allocation of resources from Grants.

39. **Police and Crime Plan End of Term Report**

The Committee agreed to note the report.

40. **Police and Crime Commissioner's Update Report**

The Committee agreed to note the report.

41. **Police and Crime Plan 2021-25 Scorecard**

Felicity Ridgway (Director of Operations) introduced the report and provided the following updates:

- a) The baseline for deaths or serious injuries by high-risk driving behaviour was showing at 74 offences in the previous report; this was incorrect and should have shown 55 offences.

The Committee agreed to note the report.

42. **Complaints Against the Commissioner**

There were no complaints against the Commissioner.

43. **Work Programme**

There were no additions to the Work Programme.