

Devon and Cornwall Police and Crime Panel

Friday 21 November 2025

PRESENT:

Councillor Haydon, in the Chair.

Councillor Chopak, Vice Chair.

Councillors Czapiewski, Ewings, German, Grey (Substituting for Cllr Ashton), Hackett, Hodgetts, Leaver, Loudoun, Penberthy, Thomas, Towill and Wright.

Independent Members: Barry Jones (Independent Member for Devon) and Caroline Jones (Independent Member for Cornwall).

Apologies for absence: Councillors Ashton, Lodge, Palethorpe, Rodger and Tyerman.

Also in attendance: Nicola Allen (Treasurer, OPCC), Jonathan Back (Head of Performance and Scrutiny, OPCC), Alison Hernandez (Police and Crime Commissioner), Frances Hughes (Chief Executive, OPCC), Jake Metcalfe (Democratic Advisor), James Vaughan (Chief Constable), and Ben Woolvin (Head of Communications and Public Affairs, OPCC).

The meeting started at 10.30 am and finished at 12.30 pm.

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.

40. **Minutes**

The minutes of the meeting that took place on 12 September 2025 were agreed as a true and accurate record.

41. **Declarations of Interest**

There were no declarations of interest.

42. **Public Questions**

There were no public questions.

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

James Vaughan (Chief Constable) presented an update on progress since the force exited special measures and outlined the objectives of Operation Resolve.

- a) 11 months ago, the force was in a period of instability following the suspension of both the Chief Constable and Acting Chief Constable, and was

subject to enhanced monitoring by HMICFRS and the Chief Constables initial priorities were:

- i. Restoring stability in the leadership team;
 - ii. Improving performance sufficiently to exit special measures;
 - iii. Setting a strategic course for future resilience, including workforce and budget planning aligned to the Police and Crime Plan;
- b) The force successfully exited enhanced monitoring in July 2025. The Chief Constable confirmed that leadership stability had been achieved, with the Deputy Chief Constable reinstated and a strong senior team in place;
- c) Operation Resolve was launched in August 2025 to restore frontline patrol and neighbourhood policing to design strength by the end of 2025. Key elements included:
- i. Returning 121 officers to uniformed roles by 01 April 2026, with 71 redeployed by Christmas 2025;
 - ii. Additional ring-fenced funding of £4.7m for neighbourhood policing, enabling recruitment of 50 neighbourhood police officers, 50 PCSOs and 20 Special Constables;
 - iii. A rank review to reduce senior officer numbers and reinvest savings into frontline roles. It was reported that one Assistant Chief Constable, two Chief Superintendents, seven Superintendents and over ten Inspectors had been removed, with further reductions planned among Sergeants;
- d) Recruitment remained challenging with applications per vacancy having fallen from 16:1 three years ago to significantly lower ratios. Multiple entry routes were available, including:
- i. Direct entry as a Detective;
 - ii. Degree apprenticeships;
 - iii. Graduate programmes;
 - iv. Standard entry without degree requirement, to attract candidates with relevant experience;

In response to questions raised it was reported that:

- e) The Chief Constable emphasised the importance of PCSOs for visible, community-focused policing. PCSOs were valued for problem-solving and reassurance, and were less likely to be diverted to other duties compared to Police Constables;

- f) The Chief Constable confirmed that firearms officers were considered specialist roles and were not part of the frontline uplift, but essential for public protection. A review of authorised firearms officer numbers was underway to ensure alignment with threat levels;
- g) On assaults against emergency workers, the Chief Constable stated that CPS was not downgrading cases. Crown Court judges had indicated that too many cases were being elected for trial rather than remaining in Magistrates' Courts, where sufficient sentencing powers existed;
- h) Hotspot policing had been delivered using central grant funding and was recognised as evidence-based in reducing violence and antisocial behaviour. The force was a national exemplar in deploying Community Safety Accreditation Scheme (CSAS) powers. Continuation of hotspot policing would depend on future funding settlements; if funding ceased, the force would seek to mainstream the approach within neighbourhood policing;
- i) It was reiterated that where people damage or deface public property, the Police would investigate the complaint and could bring people to justice for it. The issue of flags on public lampposts and flyovers was a matter for the owners of that roadside furniture to remove. If local authorities had made a decision to remove flags from street furniture, the Police would support local authorities in their lawful activity against those who seek to disrupt local authorities lawful and legitimate right to remove flags;
- j) The Chief Constable addressed concerns regarding potential disbandment of the Diverse Communities Team and advised the Panel that no decision had been made and all options remained under review. Any changes would seek to embed capability within neighbourhood teams;
- k) The Chief Constable confirmed that decisions on custody provision had not yet been made. A review was underway to assess whether the six custody centres could be consolidated to reduce costs and reinvest savings into frontline policing. Any proposals would be subject to stakeholder engagement, evaluation and consultation. The Commissioner emphasised that operational risk and arrest rates would be key considerations;
- l) The Chief Constable reiterated that recruitment was ongoing and encouraged applications for the roles of Police Officer, PCSO and Detention Officer roles, highlighting policing as a secure and rewarding career.

Actions:

1. The Commissioner to confirm completion of an Equality Impact Assessment for Operation Resolve and report back to the Panel.
2. Commissioner to ensure stakeholder engagement and evaluation strategy for custody review.

3. Commissioner to provide clarity on future decisions regarding the Diverse Communities Team.

The Panel agreed to note the report.

44. **Community Cohesion**

The report was noted as read and the Panel moved to questions:

- a) Feedback from Plymouth communities suggested a disconnect between stated commitments and lived experience. Specific issues included:
 - i. The absence of an up-to-date Public Sector Equality Duty Statement on the Police and Crime Commissioners website. The only visible document was an Equality and Diversity Policy dated 2014;
 - ii. The last published Equality Duty Statement on the police website was from 2022, with a 2024 report referenced but not accessible;
 - iii. Third Party Reporting Centres felt sidelined since the move to online reporting, as there was no dropdown option to identify reports originating from these centres. This prevented proper tracking and management;
 - iv. Rising hate crime rates in the area, which were increasing faster than overall crime, causing significant concern;
 - v. A perception among communities that the police were closing down equalities and diverse communities teams, leading to mistrust and feelings of exclusion;
 - vi. The report's framing of transgender people as a "problem" rather than recognising them as a protected characteristic.
- b) Councillor Penberthy requested that the report be rewritten to reflect the lived experience of communities across the patch and address these concerns. The Commissioner acknowledged the concerns. The Commissioner apologised for the outdated website, noting that a major data breach six months ago had resulted in the loss of historical documents. A new Head of Communications had been appointed to resolve issues;
- c) The Commissioner confirmed willingness to engage directly with Third Party Reporting Centres and review issues around online reporting. She explained that the online reporting system was a national platform used by all police forces, which limited local flexibility;
- d) The Commissioner highlighted the work of the Community Scrutiny Panel, led by Reverend Nathan Kiyagi, which scrutinised stop and search and other policing practices. The panel was described as diverse and representative,

with hundreds of members and a transparent website. Members were encouraged to engage with this panel and its published work;

- e) The Commissioner clarified that the offer around restorative justice was to fund a service delivering restorative justice for those arrested, not direct funding to the Council. It was confirmed that meetings and email exchanges had taken place but the proposal was not progressed. The Chair requested evidence of this dialogue and agreed to resolve the matter outside of the meeting;
- f) The Commissioner advised that spikes in hate crime reporting often coincided with national debates or media coverage of contentious issues. She emphasised the importance of language and local efforts to ease community tensions;
- g) The Commissioner reassured Members that all hate crimes were treated seriously and explained the distinction between hate crimes and non-crime hate incidents, which continued to be recorded as early indicators of community tensions;
- h) The Commissioner agreed to consider hate crime as a priority and confirmed that legal oversight ensured equality impact assessments were undertaken, though she could not confirm specifics;
- i) The Commissioner highlighted the Councillor Advocate Scheme, which provided direct access to local inspectors and her office, and noted that while some areas managed this well, improvements could be made where necessary.

Actions:

- 1. Commissioner to provide evidence of restorative justice funding discussions with Plymouth City Council to Councillor Haydon (Chair);
- 2. Commissioner to review concerns regarding third party reporting centres and explore improvements to online reporting processes;
- 3. Commissioner to confirm whether Equality Impact Assessments had been completed for operational changes;
- 4. That engagement between ward members, community safety partnerships, and local policing teams be strengthened, with particular attention to intelligence sharing on community events and protests;
- 5. The Community Scrutiny Panel website would be shared to all Panel members.

The Board agreed to note the report.

45. **Firearms Briefing Note**

The report was taken as read and in response to questions raised it was reported that:

- a) The Commissioner confirmed that 88% of firearms licence renewals were completed within the statutory timeframe, which was considered satisfactory given the higher risk associated with renewals as those individuals already owned firearms;
- b) It was noted that only 55% of new firearm grant applications were processed within the statutory timeframe. The Commissioner acknowledged that this was an area of concern but assured the Panel that measures were being taken to improve performance;
- c) The Commissioner highlighted a significant change in practice: the issuing of temporary licences had ceased entirely. Previously, hundreds of temporary licences had been issued to mitigate delays, but this was no longer the case, representing a major improvement in compliance and safety;
- d) The Commissioner advised that the firearms licensing process had become more complex due to additional requirements, such as obtaining letters from GPs and implementing new guidance. Of the 71 guidance changes introduced nationally, 46 had already been implemented in Devon and Cornwall;
- e) The Commissioner indicated that firearms licensing may become a national service in the future, following government reforms and recommendations from the Prevention of Future Deaths report after the Keyham inquest;
- f) Sir Geoffrey Cox MP had not contacted the Commissioners office regarding firearms licensing issues raised during the election period;
- g) Panel members expressed concern about the cost of processing firearms licence applications. Councillor Penberthy reiterated that the Panel had requested cost data to support lobbying efforts for full cost recovery. The Commissioner apologised for the omission and provided indicative figures: 43% of the total cost of the Firearms and Explosives Licensing Unit was covered by income from fees, leaving 57% unfunded. The department's staffing costs were approximately £2.3 million, excluding opportunity costs of police officers working within the unit;
- h) The Commissioner noted that while fee increases had been achieved following previous lobbying efforts, full cost recovery was challenging due to inefficiencies within the department compared to other forces. She cautioned against setting fees based on current costs without addressing efficiency concerns;
- i) Panel members suggested exploring a tiered fee structure to differentiate between licences for agricultural use and those for leisure activities, ensuring fairness and reducing the burden on farmers;

- j) The Commissioner thanked the Panel for its previous lobbying efforts, acknowledging the difficulty of advocating for increased costs in rural areas. She agreed that further lobbying may be required but emphasised the need for efficiency improvements before pursuing full cost recovery.

Actions:

1. Commissioner to provide a detailed cost analysis of processing firearms license applications, including comparison of income versus expenditure, to support lobbying efforts;
2. Commissioner to update the Panel on the progress towards implementing all 71 guidance changes;
3. Commissioner to consider a revised fee structure which could be tiered differentiating between farmers and leisure;

The Panel agreed to note the report.

46. **Police and Crime Commissioner's Performance Report**

The Police and Crime Commissioner presented the performance report and in response to questions raised it was reported that:

- a) Achieving the 95% confidence target for crime data integrity was a complex and resource-intensive process. Whilst it might appear straightforward, crime recording standards required rigorous compliance and regular auditing;
- b) The Commissioner confirmed that Devon and Cornwall Police conducted regular deep-dive audits of crime data integrity, overseen by an independent Crime Data Registrar reporting to the Deputy Chief Constable. These audits identified and corrected unrecorded crimes, particularly in serious cases such as antisocial behaviour and violent crime;
- c) Crimes previously recorded as inquiries would not be reviewed and the Commissioner stated that this was an operational matter and outside her remit. She emphasised that the current approach, endorsed by HMICFRS, involved continuous auditing and officer training to improve accuracy;
- d) The Commissioner highlighted challenges faced by frontline officers, such as recording multiple offenses disclosed during a single interaction, including historic crimes. Training was being provided to ensure officers recorded all relevant information accurately;
- e) The Commissioner acknowledged that the report did not clearly identify the offenses recorded as ASB and agreed that greater clarity was required in future reports;
- f) Hotspot policing remained a priority but noted that its integration into business-as-usual had been delayed due to additional funding for overtime. She explained that future challenges would include embedding hotspot

policing into core operations and evaluating its effectiveness. While academic evidence suggested it should reduce crime, under-reporting in high-crime areas remained a significant issue;

- g) The Commissioner agreed that improved reporting would enhance public confidence and help build better intelligence and noted that community safety partnerships currently managed combined data from councils and police under statutory duties. However, she acknowledged the absence of a Peninsula Strategic Assessment due to resource constraints and suggested that reinstating strategic analysis capacity could be a future recommendation;
- h) Stabilising neighbourhood and patrol staffing through Operation Resolve was critical to maintaining hotspot policing and preventing abstraction of resources;
- i) The Commissioner confirmed that there was no threshold for serious crimes and invited members to raise any specific concerns directly with her office if reports of serious crimes, including modern slavery were not being investigated;

Actions:

- 1. The Commissioner to review the presentation of ASB data in future reports to provide greater detail on offense categories.
- 2. The Commissioner to consider reinstating strategic analytical capacity to improve integrated data reporting.
- 3. Commissioner to ensure clarity on reporting processes for serious concerns such as modern slavery and confirm that no threshold applied.

The Panel agreed to note the report.

47. **Non-criminal Complaints Against the Police and Crime Commissioner**

Frances Hughes (Chief Executive, Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner) advised the Panel that there were no new complaints since the last meeting of the Panel.

The Panel agreed to note the report.

48. **Action Log**

The Chair introduced the item and invited comments from members regarding the Action Log and agenda-setting process.

- a) Action 8: Regarding the Commissioner's update on the delivery of the Safer Streets programme: The Commissioner clarified that no separate document existed, as the programme was managed through quarterly returns to government. Details had been included in previous update reports, and the Commissioner agreed to reference this in the Action Log;

- b) Action 15: was being progressed and the accessible version would be available on the Office of the Police and Crime Commissioners website;
- c) Action 35: Firearms licensing costs would remain open to allow for further discussion following the Commissioner's commitment to write to MPs regarding full cost recovery;
- d) Action 8: Draft plan for Safer Streets. This information was contained within the Commissioner's Update report;
- e) Action added for the Commissioner to attend Bideford or provide a date for such a visit, due to concerns around shoplifting and its impact on local businesses;
- f) Action 17: Creation of an annual report accessible to young people and schools. The Commissioner confirmed that engagement with schools was ongoing and that AI tools were being explored to simplify language. However, it was noted that uncertainty about future commitments due to the government's announcement on abolishing the PCC role.

The Panel agreed to note the progress of the action log.

49. **Work Programme**

The Panel agreed to add the following to the work programme:

- a) Enhanced antisocial behaviour (ASB) report and hotspot analytics;
- b) Custody suites, noting that local councils could provide input prior to any final decisions;
- c) Vision Zero and Community Speedwatch.

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