

Staffordshire Police, Fire and Crime Panel

Report of the Chairman of the Police, Fire and Crime Panel

To Staffordshire County Council

In accordance with agreed practice I am reporting on matters dealt with at a meeting of the Staffordshire Police, Fire and Crime Panel on 29 October 2018 in order to draw your attention to issues of wider interest and/or implications.

Extension of the Panel's remit

From 1 August 2018 the Police and Crime Commissioner's role extended to include governance responsibility for the Staffordshire Fire and Rescue Service. Correspondingly, the Panel's remit was widened to include that Service.

In the lead up to the 29 October meeting, to help Panel members fulfil their new role, training had been provided on the role and responsibilities of the Fire and Rescue Service, from both a national and local perspective. In addition Scrutiny 'Refresher' training had been delivered with some emphasis on the Fire and Rescue element of the Panel's role. These events aimed to assist the Panel in ensuring that its members possess knowledge and understanding of the Fire and Rescue Service.

Staffordshire Police, Fire and Crime Panel – Monday 29 October 2018

This was my first meeting as the County Council's representative (and as Chairman) and the Panel's first meeting since the extension of its remit.

Issues discussed included:

Award of Contract for the provision of Domestic Abuse Support Services.

During the summer period, the Commissioner had awarded a contract for the provision of Domestic Abuse support services to a national organisation. The published decision on that contract explained that it had followed a joint review by the Commissioner, Staffordshire County Council and Stoke-on-Trent City Council of the provision of services and that a full tendering and evaluation exercise had been carried out.

The Panel agenda provides for questions to the Commissioner from members of the public. The award of the Domestic Abuse Support Services Contract attracted a total of 8 questions from the public. One questioner attended the meeting to present his questions in person. The main issues raised by questioners revolved around the fairness of the tender and evaluation process, the loss of the contract and funding by local support organisations and concerns about the future provision of Refuges for those subjected to abuse.

Responding the Commissioner reported his view on the robust and fair nature of the tender and evaluation process which provided for a single cross-county service of a constant standard, available to all. He referred to discussions taking place with local

organisations on means of providing for their continued involvement in the provision of support to victims of abuse. Referring to the provision of Refuges the Commissioner stressed that this was a local authority responsibility, with funding allocated by them. He was keen to continue to work with Councils to provide a co-ordinated service.

Fire and Rescue Service Matters

Transfer of Governance Responsibility and Collaboration – The Commissioner reported that one of his priorities since the transfer of governance responsibility to him in August 2018 had been to complete a programme of visits/discussions with all firefighters and staff. He commended all involved in the transfer for the positive approach adopted by them, specifically senior management who were working closely with their colleagues in the Police Service to identify areas where collaboration would be beneficial. He acknowledged the complex nature of both organisations.

Commenting on specific service areas, the Commissioner listed a number of functions for which joint working arrangements had been in operation for some time and acknowledged the need to prioritise action to address the shortage of retained Firefighters in Staffordshire. He also reported that discussions were underway with the Chairman of the Controlling Board for the West Midlands Central Control Service on future arrangements. Looking to future proposals the Commissioner reported the establishment of a Governance Board to identify and make recommendations to him on opportunities for collaboration/service improvement.

Budget and Medium Term Financial Strategy.- The financial position ‘inherited’ by the Commissioner was a total budget for 2018/19 of £40.216million, 37% of which was central government funded , the remainder raised by the Precept. The Service was committed to a 4 year efficiency plan to achieve £4million of savings up to 2019/20. (in turn commitment to that 4 year plan had given the service security regarding its central government funding levels over the four years) Up to March 2018 £2.2m had been achieved. the remaining £1.8m of savings had reduced to £1.3million following a higher than assumed Council Tax Precept rate for the current year. Measure were in place to achieve the £1.3million.

The Commissioner reported on Central Governments recent announcement on the need to increase employer contributions to the Firefighters Pension Scheme with effect from 2019/20 following review by the Actuary. National level discussions were currently taking place on the funding of any increase in contributions. Other risks to the budget position were reported, including potential reductions on Government funding and the effect of any change in the way in which the Capital Programme was funded. Savings anticipated as a result of changes to the Service governance arrangements were detailed however none had been incorporated into the current years budget.

A number of assumptions on central and local funding levels and pension costs to the service up to 2021/22 were detailed which gave a predicted budget deficit in 2021/22 of £2.469million.

Police Service Matters

Delivery of the Commissioner's Safer, Fairer, United Communities for Staffordshire Strategy/Early intervention Theme- Discussion centred on the SPACE scheme to which the Commissioner had allocated funding during the 2018 summer period. In practice the Commissioner allocates funding to organisations, including local councils, to set up and run youth engagement schemes during the summer school holiday periods, in order to reduce anti-social behaviour

The Commissioner was questioned on the extent to which the funding provides for new diversionary activities over and above those already provided by organisations such as Youth Clubs. The Commissioner acknowledged that in some instances established activities were being incorporated into the SPACE scheme, suggesting that this reflected their wish to be associated with the strong reputation of SPACE and its achievements. His funding did provide for new, additional projects which otherwise would not exist. The overall reduction on anti-social behaviour was his priority and he expressed appreciation of the work of many partner organisations and volunteers in delivering the SPACE scheme. Other issue which the Commissioner was asked to consider in relation to SPACE were the complexity of the funding application process and the wish to see the scheme extended to provide all year round activities.

Safer Neighbourhood Panels – members queried the Commissioners intentions in relation to Safer Neighbourhood Panels seeking assurances about their continued funding. The Commissioner reiterated his wish to review the Panels due to a wide variation in their effectiveness and degree of public engagement. He continued to look to SNPs as a means of providing local accountability for the Police Service.

Budget and Medium Term Financial Strategy – The updated Medium Term Financial Strategy showed an estimated funding gap of c£15million. This was an increase from the £13million reported to Panel in February 2018 and was mainly due to recent government announcements on an increase in employer contributions to the Police Pension Scheme with effect from 2019/20. The Commissioner reported on national discussions on the funding of the additional contributions and gave assurances that at the present time he was pursuing the recruitment and appointment of additional warranted officers in line with his proposals when the 2018/19 'enhanced' Precept was approved.

Referring to the national Policing picture, the Commissioner reported that whilst Government funding remained stable, the percentage allocated to national priorities was increasing, reflecting the changing nature of crime. He briefly summarised

national and local police performance levels commenting on the risks to local performance posed by budget reductions.

The Gap analysis for the Police Service budget was £9.220million in 2019/20. Savings resulting from collaboration with the Fire and Rescue Service had not yet been incorporated into forecasts.

The Commissioner has requested the opportunity to discuss budget options for 2019/20 with the Panel prior to submitting formal proposals to their January 2019 meeting. A consultation workshop is therefore being arranged where Police Service finances will be discussed in detail.

Workload of Panel

Panel members are concerned about the ability of the current meeting structure/frequency (4 meetings per annum) to accommodate the increased demands on them.. I will look in more detail at options to manage the workload.

For more information on this meeting or on the Police and Crime Panel in general please contact Julie Plant (01785 276135 e mail Julie.plant@staffordshire.gov.uk) or Helen Phillips (01785 276143 or helen.phillips@staffordshire.gov.uk)

Details of Panel meetings are issued to contact officers in each of the District/Borough Councils in the County and Stoke-on-Trent City Council for posting on their own web sites.

Stephen Sweeney

Staffordshire Police, Fire and Crime Panel Chairman

Staffordshire County Council