

Minutes of the Staffordshire Police, Fire and Crime Panel Meeting held on 28 October 2019

Present: Stephen Sweeney (Chairman)

Carl Bennett
Randolph Conteh
Paul Darby
Stephen Doyle
Ann Edgeller
Brian Edwards

Simon Gaskin
Tony Holmes
Keith Walker
Jill Waring
Ashley Yeates

Apologies were submitted by Sue Finney – Observer representative of the Commissioners Ethics, Transparency and Audit Panel.

PART ONE

19. Declarations of interest

There were no declarations of interest on this occasion.

20. Minutes of the meeting held on 15 July 2019

The Minutes of the Panel meeting held on 15 July 2019 were circulated.

Questions from Members of the Public – Minute No. 7

The Secretary sought permission to make an administrative amendment to Minute no. 7 for it to read that a petition submitted by County Councillor Kyle Robinson related to the closure of the Public Police Desk located at Kidsgrove Town Hall (not the closure of Kidsgrove Police Station).

Police Establishment Numbers – Minute No. 8

Panel members had separately received a briefing note from the OPCC on the base numbers on which proposed increases in Police numbers by a total of 69 over the 2018/19 and 2019/20 had been calculated. The note reported on the practice of using a Target Operating Model (TOM) figure when determining required staffing levels. That number varied according to the service model being implemented but did not take frequent changes in actual numbers employed due to retirements etc. Consequently the Commissioner submitted that the figures he quoted were more accurate than establishment numbers identified by Panel members from Home Office records which were an recorded at a fixed point in time.

The Commissioner reported on TOMs for 2017-2021 indicating that the actual number employed by 31 March 2020 was expected to exceed the TOM by 3 posts at a total of 1639.5. He also referred to recent Home Office announcements on increases in policing numbers in 2020/21 giving an additional 90 posts in Staffordshire. More details on those posts and their funding was awaited.

Panel members continued to seek clarification from the Commissioner of the increases in the TOM during the 2018/19 and 2019/20 financial years, in order to satisfy themselves that the Commissioner's undertaking to Council Tax payers that the increase in Precept would fund an additional 69 Police Officer posts was being adhered to.

Discussion widened to comparative figures for budgets and establishment figures for similar/neighbouring Force areas and more information was requested in view of the Panels concerns that the Staffordshire Force is ranked 3rd from bottom of the Table for numbers of warranted officers per 100,000 population. Assurances were sought that the Force was sufficiently resourced to provide an efficient and effective service.

RESOLVED – (i) That with the amendment to minute no. 7 as detailed above, the minutes of the meeting held on 15 July 2019 be confirmed and signed by the Chairman; and

(ii) That the Commissioner report to the next Panel meeting on the reasons for the Staffordshire Force appearing to fund fewer Officer and staff posts than comparative Forces with lower budgets.

21. Decisions published by the Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner (PFCC)

Details were submitted of decisions made by the Commissioner relating to the commissioning of Forensic Drug Analysis Services by 3 separate contractors and Early Intervention work by the Prince's Trust.

22. Questions to the PFCC from Members of the Public

Mr A Reid attended the meeting and asked the Commissioner to consider removing the Eccleshall Police Station site from sale on the open market to enable the community to draw up a viable proposition for its future use. Mr Reid submitted that Community Groups were unable to compete with commercial organisations and suggested that the site had to be retained for community use.

For his part the Commissioner reported a wish to see the site used by the community and a willingness to consider proposals however to date different sectors of the community appeared to have conflicting views which hadn't been resolved. In view of the Moratorium currently applicable to the site due to its listing as an Asset of Community Value, no action on its sale would be taken in the short term however he remained mindful of his duty to realise best value.

Mr Reid reported his wish to work with the community groups to identify an agreed proposal for the future use of the site.

23. Corporate Safety Plan

The Commissioner submitted a progress report on the delivery of projects/initiatives under the Corporate Safety Plan, particularly highlighting the effectiveness of the Safe and Well campaign which provided advice and guidance to specific vulnerable groups in the community on home safety and signposting to support from other agencies. The

Commissioner sought to promote information sharing between agencies to help widen the scope of the campaign.

Members queried the increase in Secondary Fires over the 3 year reporting period (defined as small outdoor fires not involving people or property). The Commissioner reported that awareness sessions were being designed for delivery via the new Safe and Sound immersive pods, the introduction of which had generated significant public and press interest both locally and regionally.

Recent developments within the Service included work with Western Power to address the increase in incidents at the point at which mains electricity supplies feed into business premises.

Of note was a recent visit by Home Office representatives to view the Community Sprinkler Project, and the opportunity it presented for Staffordshire to give an input into future building safety legislation.

Members gave feedback on the recent Workshop on the process involved in determining the Corporate Safety Plan for 2020-2024. The event had been informative and increased their understanding of the duties and responsibilities of the Fire and Rescue Service.

RESOLVED – That the update be noted.

24. Budget /Medium Term Financial Strategy Update - Fire and Rescue Service

The Fire and Rescue Service Budget and MTFS were reported to be on target. £0.3m of an efficiency/saving target of £0.5million applied for 2019/20 as the final year of a four year budgetary commitment to the Home Office had been realised to date. The MTFS remained constant with a forecast funding gap of around £3million at 2022/23. Of note was an indication from the Home Office that for 2020/21 budgets levels were expected to be protected with the Settlement Funding Assessment likely to be increased by inflation.

Members queried the reported ongoing uncertainty around the delivery and funding of the national Emergency Service Mobile Communications Programme (ESMCP) noting that the current MTFS continued to assume costs in line with the systems currently in use.

The Public Works Loans Board recent increase in its interest rate was noted however the Section151 Officer reported that the Board remained a favourable option.

RESOLVED – That the Budget and MediumTerm Financial Strategy Update be noted.

25. Budget/Medium Term Financial Strategy Update - Police Service

The report focussed on the extent to which national factors, such as pay awards, ROCU (Regional Organised Crime Unit) funding and Precept Referendum changes (predicted to be reduced to 2% for 2020/21) had affected the overall budgetary position. A significant increase in the funding gap of circa £5.7m by 2022/23 resulted. The

Commissioner reported that overall spend levels were favourable with in year budgets on track.

With regard to the Capital Budgets, General Reserves had been reinstated to approximately 3% of net revenue budget. Higher than anticipated receipts for the sale of Police estate would contribute to overall funding levels the future use of which was to be determined. Uncertainty around future national funding presented difficulties in submitting positive proposals to address funding shortfalls. For example, Government pledges for additional police officers (estimated to provide 90 more officers in Staffordshire) did not set out long term funding arrangements for those posts. In addition, the suggested return of the Precept Referendum limit to 2% had consequences for future budgets which had been based on the assumption of a 2.99% increase. The Commissioner's response to national consultation was calling for local flexibility on Precept levels.

RESOLVED -That the Budget and Medium Term Financial Strategy Update be noted.

26. Safer, Fairer, United Communities for Staffordshire - Update

Submitting a progress report on work streams and projects under each of the five themes in the Strategy, the Commissioner highlighted the success of the expanded SPACE Programme during the summer school holiday period. Data was awaited on levels of reported Anti Social Behaviour during the corresponding period.

The Commissioner also referred to his decision to increase funding to successful Early Intervention projects commissioned with the Princes Trust which had resulted in 64% of young people who were engaged in the Programme achieving a positive outcome in terms of education, training or employment.

Members queried the operation of the 101 Reporting Service quoting reports of lengthy response times experienced by callers. The Commissioner acknowledged the fluctuations in performance of the Service and reported on discussion taking place with the Chief Constable to secure improvements.

Members called for a review of the reporting of each Theme's activities to ensure that the most recent activities were reported.

RESOLVED – That the report be noted.

27. Collaborative Working Update

The Commissioner reported on the pleasing and innovative approach being adopted by both Services and paid particular tribute to the positive attitude of staff affected by the re-organisation of various support functions to provide a 'Joint Enabling Service'. To date Communications, Procurement, Estates and Facilities and HR had been integrated with the Finance function to follow later in the year, subject to consultation.

With regard to the joint use of facilities by the two Services, the Commissioner reported that the co-location of the Tamworth neighbourhood policing Team with the Fire and Rescue Service at Tamworth Community Fire Station was nearing completion. Planning

continued for the move of the northern policing response team to Hanley Community Fire Station. Both proposals would provide on going financial benefits and capital receipts.

At the time of the appointment of a single Section 151 Officer for both the OPFCC and the Fire and Rescue Service, the Panel requested a six month update on the practical implementation of that combined role. The Commissioner reported that the skills and expertise of the postholder combined with the reallocation of some of the posts' previous duties meant that the merger of roles had been successful with the postholders experience in developing collaborative working bringing benefits across the board.

RESOLVED – That the update on collaboration between the two services be noted.

28. Update on Implementation of Appeals/Reviews

The Commissioner reported that as part of reforms to Police complaints handling systems, Regulations were due to be implemented from February 2020 giving him mandatory responsibility for determining reviews/appeals from the public against decisions of the Force on complaints made to them.

The Commissioner reported on preparations for the new role and reported that the Regulations provided 2 further optional, more detailed stages of involvement in complaints handling however, in line with the majority of colleagues nationally he did not intend to pursue these options at present.

RESOLVED – That the Commissioners proposed future level of involvement in determining police complaints be noted.

29. Questions to the PFCC by Panel Members

Members of the Panel questioned/sought the views of the Commissioner on the following issues and received the responses indicated:

Question/Issue	Response
What is the current position re the recent inspection by HMIFRSC?	All Fire and Rescue Services have been inspected nationally and results are awaited.
Can the Commissioner arrange for local representatives to have direct access numbers for key personnel in the Police and Fire and Rescue Services? Recent experience in dealing with the flooding of Stafford Town Centre had highlighted communication shortfalls	Will consult both Services.
Serious violence and hate crime is on the increase. What is being proposed to address this situation?	There has been a marginal reduction in levels of Hate Crime in Staffordshire. We work with the Victims Gateway to provide support to those affected.

What progress has been made in recruiting Police Officers and PCSOs?	See previous minutes re recruitment
Will the public in future be able to have contact with the police apart from the 101 system since the number of Police Stations has been reduced?	The demand for face-face contact with the Police has reduced considerably in recent years – on line access to services was now the preferred option.
Is there a Police pathway for young people 16/17 years old that have committed a crime but are suffering Mental Health issues?	It is not permitted to detain young people in Police cells. In recent years major advances have been made in joint working with Health sector colleagues and dedicated specialist teams to provide appropriate support to people with mental health issues who are initially attended to by the Police.
Members of the public are reporting lengthy journeys/long waits for response teams since the introduction of the three operating bases model. Is this considered acceptable?	Response teams report to an operating base but then locate in a neighbourhood area so long journeys are not experienced.
Has the closure of Custody Suites/Stations had an effect on the accessibility of evidence? or affected the length of time taken for officers to deal with individual cases?	Issue not raised previously – will consult the Chief Constable

30. Dates of Future Meetings and Work Programme

The Secretary submitted proposed Panel meeting dates and a suggested Work Programme for the period to February 2021 commenting on the possible need to review current meeting/reporting arrangements following the Commissioner Elections in May 2020.

RESOLVED – That the dates be confirmed but reviewed post May 2020 if appropriate.

31. Exclusion of the Public

RESOLVED – That the public be excluded from the meeting for the following item of business which involves the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in the paragraph of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972 as indicated.

32. Staffordshire Commissioner (Police and Crime) - Decision 2019/20 - 003 (exemption paragraph 3)

The Panel had received notice of a decision published by the Commissioner relating to the acceptance of bids for various Police Station /sites declared surplus to requirements. Whilst being unable to disclose individual bids due to commercial sensitivity the

Commissioner reported that Receipts would exceed estimates. The use of those Receipts was yet to be determined.

Chairman