

Minutes of the Safe and Strong Communities Select Committee Meeting held on 5 September 2016

Present: John Francis (Chairman)

Attendance

Margaret Astle
Mike Davies
Terry Finn

Robert Marshall
Christine Mitchell
Mark Olszewski

Also in attendance: Matthew Ellis, Staffordshire PCC and Glynn Dixon, Chief of Staff to the PCC.

Apologies: Maureen Compton, Gill Heath and David Williams

PART ONE

17. Declarations of Interest

In connection with minute no. 19:

- Mr M Olszewski declared an interest in relation to questions that may be considered about Stafford Prison in his capacity working for the National Offenders Rehabilitation Service; and
- Mr T Finn, Mrs C Mitchell, Mr M Davies and Mr R Marshall declared an interest as members of the Staffordshire Fire Authority.

18. Minutes of the previous meeting held on 8 July 2016

RESOLVED – That, subject to reference to “Lichfield” skate park being amended to “Burntwood” skate park at minute 12, the minutes of the 8 July 2016 Safe and Strong Communities Select Committee be confirmed and signed by the Chairman.

19. Community Safety

Staffordshire’s Police and Crime Commissioner (PCC), Mr Matthew Ellis, attended the meeting for Select Committee Members to scrutinise his work on community safety. The PCC informed Members that the key challenges faced when he first became Commissioner were predominantly financial challenges and around poor technology and multiple IT systems. Changes in the types of crime, including the rise of internet crime, also required changes in approach from the more traditional image of policing. The PCC explained the work he had undertaken to address the lack of investment and the use of improved mobile technology allowing more visible policing. A wider approach to policing was being developed as part of the National Transformation of Policing to ensure the service was fit for the future. The pace of change was growing with a move to preventative rather than reactive policing.

The Select Committee had a number of questions they then put to the PCC.

How are you ensuring visible policing?

Members felt there were less police officers, Police Community Support Officers (PCSOs), and police vehicles visible in communities. The PCC informed Members that visibility was a top priority. Replacing outdated technology systems allowed significantly less time spent in police stations filling out forms and enabled better and more visible use of police officers. Approximately one third of the new technology had been rolled out to date, with the final two thirds rolled out in November 2016 and January 2017. The Force had a new Assistant Chief Constable (ACC) for territorial policing who was looking at the impact of visibility on community policing and how this could be improved. It was anticipated that there could be a possible 200,000 extra hours of police time to be gained from using the new technology, as whilst the necessary administration would continue, this could be undertaken out in communities rather than the need to return to police stations.

The PCC expressed disappointment that Members felt police vehicle visibility had not improved. He informed Members that at least 80% of police vehicles were now marked. The PCC also informed them of the Central Motorways Policing Group (CMPG), made up of officers from the West Midlands, West Mercia and Staffordshire Police Forces. This allowed more regional ways of working which was encouraged by HMIC. The OPCC Chief of Staff, Mr Glynn Dixon, was currently looking at whether the CMPG could absorb more substantial road network policing in Staffordshire. This would give the advantage of a less fragmented service.

The PCC agreed there was an urgent need to review the Staffordshire Road Safety Partnership, feeling this was too detached from day to day business. Following a review six months earlier there had been a move away from placing cameras in areas most likely to catch and fine drivers to those areas with genuine safety concerns.

Members welcomed these initiatives but felt there had been little effect on improved visibility. They remained concerned at difficulties in getting police officers and/or PCSOs to attend local residential meetings and felt there was a general lack of engagement. They also expressed concern at response times and difficulties with 101 calls. Members gave examples of poor visibility in community policing in Kidsgrove and shared concerns that the general public were losing faith in the police service.

The PCC informed Members that Staffordshire had not lost the number of police officers that other forces had. Across the Country there had been a reduction of 17% whilst Staffordshire had increased by 1%. However if the resources were not used effectively then visibility would not improve and there was a need for a cultural change to ensure mobile technology was used effectively and police officers remained within the community rather than in police stations. Local Commanders needed to embrace this cultural change. He also informed the Select Committee that police officers should not in general be spending more than ten minutes at a meeting as the more time they spent in meetings the less they had on the streets and there was a need for a balanced approach.

The PCC accepted that there had been difficulties with 101 calls but felt that they were now performing well.

The Select Committee noted that the police workforce had reduced by 18% since 2010, whereas the reduction had been 15% nationally. There was less police officers per 1000 people in Staffordshire than nationally. The PCC informed Members that he stopped the reduction in staff once he came to office. Since 2012 Staffordshire numbers had reduced less than in other areas of the country.

What are the causes of rising violent crime figures locally and how is this being addressed, particularly in respect of managing hate crimes since Brexit and the increase in knife crime?

The PCC informed Members that the biggest increase was due to what now constituted violent crime, with an example given of offensive tweets now being considered as a violent crime. He felt that the media were largely responsible for rousing concerns around Brexit. Distinguishing whether a hate crime resulted from Brexit was not possible and he felt this was an artificial media engineered issue.

What has and is changing to ensure the protection of the most vulnerable?

The work undertaken by Staffordshire Police around people with mental health issues being placed in police cells had been successful, with a 53% reduction. Vulnerability covered many variations and therefore policing was much more complex. Training of police officers had been developed to increase awareness around vulnerability.

Work was underway to jointly commission domestic abuse services across Stoke on Trent and Staffordshire to ensure services were not based on postcode and to have a one Staffordshire approach. There was a need for information to be managed properly and the PCC shared concerns around the information flow with the NHS which was poor.

Members asked whether the PCC had been surprised by the recent damning report around domestic abuse and whether he had been aware of the failings. The PCC informed Members that since the report was published the HMIC had pulled back from some of their criticism and had now given a clean bill of health. The PCC had some criticism of HMIC feeling that they measured quantitative detail that in many instances added no value rather than the more difficult qualitative performance. The reason for the concerns in Staffordshire's domestic abuse figures was due to Domestic Abuse Incident Log (DAIL) reporting. The PCC wanted his officers to make a judgement as to whether there was a need to create a paper chase on what may be unsubstantiated reports. He did accept that at an extreme level there was some justification for the criticism and that his officers were now beginning to use DIAL more robustly, however he felt that in many ways it was bureaucracy for bureaucracy's sake and made little difference to frontline outcomes.

Members informed the PCC of a meeting in Burntwood with a group of vulnerable adults and agreed to forward the outcome of the meeting to the OPCC for information.

What is the effect of Policing Hubs?

Investigation services were to be centralised in the north and south of the county. This initiative had been something the Police Force had been requesting for some time as it enabled expertise for investigations to work more effectively together.

How often are police cells being used as places of safety? What has/will be done to address this?

The PCC informed Members that he had raised this issue nationally and the concerns raised had led to the Concordat national initiative. There had been a significant reduction since the PCC initiative to include a mental health specialist working with the Police Force. The PCC had funded this initially and more recently the NHS had agreed to provide this service. The PCC informed Members that there had been some differences in the level of service since the NHS took over funding this initiative however he intended to look at this again to see whether there was a need for further funding from the OPCC. The PCC recounted a recent example of an individual with mental health issues who had been in a police cell for 64 hours until appropriate care was found. The PCC explained that this had largely been due to an inability for each of the NHS trusts the individual had moved through wanting to take responsibility for his care. The PCC had since received an apology from the NHS for their shortcoming in this instance.

What work is being undertaken to minimise any potential risk posed from sex offenders who are released from Stafford Prison?

Centralising this type of offender in specific prisons allowed specialist support and rehabilitation work to be undertaken. In this way offenders were more likely to receive the type of support that would prevent re-offending than if there were fewer numbers spread across the more of the prison service. The PCC had sought assurances for the safety of Staffordshire residents when the proposed specialism was suggested and he in turn assured Members that the right processes were in place. The Probation and Police Service were aware of where an individual was released to and the requirements placed on them. A detailed briefing note had been produced by the OPCC on the resettlement service and this would be forwarded to the Select Committee.

Members asked what the current situation was in Staffordshire in respect of Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE). Much work had been done in this area with the OPCC leading on a strategy to join the various pieces of information onto one system. It was a very comprehensive jigsaw of information which would be linked primarily through the Multi Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH). There were clear expectations on each organisation performing their part in this process. A copy of the CSE Framework would be forwarded to Select Committee Members.

The PCC also informed Members that he wanted to instigate a route and branch audit of democratic service governance issues to help rationalise community safety governance. The PCC said he would welcome the Select Committees help with this rationalisation process.

What is your current and future envisaged relationship with the Fire and rescue Service in Staffordshire?

An independent report had identified opportunities and synergies between the Police and Fire Service. The Fire Service had been successful in reducing the impact of fires and had improved fire safety. The demands on the Fire Service had reduced dramatically. Broadly speaking the PCC felt the Police and Fire Services worked towards the same aim, i.e. to keep people safe. The number of calls to the Fire Service averaged 23 per day compared with 550 to the Police Service. He felt there was the potential for significant savings to be made, particularly when considering back office

services and avoiding inefficiencies around deployment. There was also efficiencies to be made within leadership with the Fire Service having significantly larger leadership roles than the Police despite being one fifth its size.

Legislation now enabled PCCs to make a determination to the Secretary of State on the future of these arrangements. Staffordshire's PCC explained that he would rather find an agreed way forward than needing a determination. The outcome of the independent review was expected in early October, with discussions expected to be held with the Fire Service at the end of October.

Members suggested there may be better synergies in joining the Ambulance and Fire Services rather than the Fire and Police Services. The PCC felt the closer synergy was between Police and Fire Services with a greater prospect of a successful marriage between these services. He informed Members that he had been under some pressure to include the Ambulance Service as well but that he had ruled this out.

How local crime statistics are made available to Members?

These were available on line for Members to access themselves. A new Dashboard website had been developed and gave Members the ability to compare crime figures across areas as well as across the County. Members requested that the link to this Dashboard be forwarded to them.

How can the use of drones be monitored?

The Civil Aviation Authority was the lead authority on this issue. Only where an issue impacted on common law would the police be involved.

RESOLVED – That the following documents be forwarded to Select Committee Members:

- briefing report on re-settlement service for sex offenders at Stafford Prison
- CSE comprehensive framework
- link to the dashboard enabling Members to access local crime figures

20. Work Programme

The Scrutiny Manager informed Members that the Chairman and Vice Chairman had a Triangulation meeting arranged shortly where consideration would be given to timing of the current work programme items. The following items had been requested for the future meetings:

- Customer feedback on complaints,
- Update on modern day slavery, and
- Deprivation of Liberty Safeguards (DoLS).

RESOLVED – That the amendments to the work programme be noted.

Chairman

