

MINUTES of the meeting of the **SURREY POLICE AND CRIME PANEL** held at 10.30 am on 3 February 2023 at Woodhatch Place, Reigate, Surrey.

These minutes are subject to confirmation by the Panel at its next meeting.

Members:

(*Present)

District Councillor Paul Kennedy
Borough Councillor Victor Lewanski
Borough Councillor Valerie White
John Robini (Chairman)
Mr Martin Stilwell
Borough Councillor Barry J F Cheyne
Borough Councillor Hannah Dalton
Borough Councillor Ellen Nicholson
Cllr Richard Morris

Apologies:

Keith Witham
District Councillor Mick Gillman

7/23 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE [Item 1]

Apologies were received from Cllr Mick Gillman and Cllr Keith Witham. Cllr John Furey attended remotely, so was unable to vote.

8/23 MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETINGS: 21 NOVEMBER 2022 AND 17 JANUARY 2023 [Item 2]

The minutes of the meetings held on 21 November 2022 and 17 January 2023 were agreed as true records of the meetings.

9/23 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST [Item 3]

None received.

10/23 PUBLIC QUESTIONS [Item 4]

None received.

11/23 CHAIRMAN'S COMMENTS [Item 5]

Witness:

Councillor John Robini, Chairman of the Surrey Police and Crime Panel

1. The Chairman thanked the Force and the Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner (OPCC) for their efforts in producing the 2023/24 budget. The Chairman recognised the challenging circumstances, as residents were struggling with their personal finances and the Force was struggling to maintain their operational services with the budgetary pressures they were facing.
2. The Chairman informed the Panel that he planned to write a letter to the Government, urging them to review their formula used for police funding. The Panel supported this.

12/23 VANGUARD ROAD SAFETY TEAM BRIEFING [Item 6]

Key points raised in the discussion:

1. It was agreed that a briefing on the work of the team could be provided at a later date, once the team was more established.

Actions/requests for further information:

1. **R1/23** – The Panel's support officer to organise a briefing for the Panel on the work of the Vanguard Road Safety team.

RESOLVED:

The Panel noted the report.

13/23 SURREY POLICE GROUP (OPCC & CHIEF CONSTABLE COMBINED) FINANCIAL REPORT FOR MONTH EIGHT OF FINANCIAL YEAR 2022/23 [Item 7]

Witness:

Kelvin Menon, Chief Finance Officer (OPCC)

Key points raised in the discussion:

1. The Chief Finance Officer (CFO) explained that there was a forecasted underspend of £2.5 million largely due to staffing, as there were a substantial number of vacancies. The capital budget was also predicted to be underspent due to phasing of projects and the decision to redevelop Mount Browne, rather

than move the headquarters. The requirements of Mount Browne were being reassessed.

2. A Panel Member noted that the Force needed to recruit 250 officers in 2023/24 and queried the reasons that officers were leaving. The CFO clarified that there was no uplift requirement in 2023/24, however, Forces had to maintain officer numbers which included historic figures and the uplift number. Therefore, 250 officers was the estimate when taking into account natural turnover. The CFO explained that there was no main reason that officers were leaving, however, he noted that they were able to retire after 30 years of service and often they would move to more affordable parts of the country with cheaper housing.
3. A Member asked whether the CFO was confident in the plans to tackle the high vacancy rate. The CFO explained that it was difficult to compete with private sector salaries, however, allowances had been reviewed for a number of posts and shift allowances had also been revised. Recruitment was a long process due to the amount of time that vetting took. The Member asked whether there was a quicker route for vetting. The CFO explained that it already took place internally, but it was a proper and thorough process. There had been national recommendations for vetting, following recent cases with officers in the Metropolitan Police.
4. A Member asked how the reserves were expected to operate over the current (2022/23) and next (2023/24) financial year. The CFO explained that all of the reserves were under the control of the Police and Crime Commissioner (PCC). Transfers to reserves were not made until the end of the financial year, the transfer in 2022/23 was expected be circa £150,000. The same transfer was expected in 2023/24 but was again not made until the end of the financial year. The Member queried the extent to which manufacturing delays impacted the outturn for the current financial year. The CFO was not aware of a significant underspend on vehicles, he explained that he was aware of long lead times due to the non-availability of computer chips. There was a national tender process at the moment for a new contract for vehicles, there had also been additional demand for vehicles due to uplift.

RESOLVED:

The Panel noted the report.

14/23 2023/24 BUDGET AND PROPOSED PRECEPT [Item 8]

Witnesses:

Lisa Townsend, Surrey Police and Crime Commissioner

Kelvin Menon, Chief Finance Officer (OPCC)

Key points raised in the discussion:

1. The PCC introduced the item, emphasising the rising costs that the Force was facing, such as the vehicle fuel bill increasing by over £500,000 in the last year. Government grant funding for policing nationally only rose by 1.8% and therefore, PCCs made representation to indicate the shortfall of £0.5 billion for policing. The response from government was to increase the Precept cap to £15, rather than to increase government funding. The Force had a good record of delivering savings, however, it became harder to deliver more savings over time. Police staff could suffer from any potential cuts, and this would have a substantial impact, as they formed the backbone of the services provided. The consultation results showed that 57% of respondents were in favour of an increase of £15. The PCC explained that she had little choice but to propose an increase of the Precept to £15, which was equivalent to 5% and well below the current rate of inflation.
2. A Panel Member noted that last year the Panel unanimously supported the £10 increase of the Precept and the staff vacancy rate increased despite this. The Panel Member asked whether this year's increase would be spent on frontline policing or whether there would be another underspend due to staffing issues. The CFO explained that the high vacancy rate was a temporary situation due to the economy and labour market. There would not be an ongoing underspend, as the posts needed to be filled. If the Precept was not increased to £15, the money would be lost forever, and the posts would never manage to be filled. Officer pay would also increase by at least 2% and the Precept funding would help to address future financial issues. The Panel Member asked whether this was the right time to increase the Precept or whether there should be greater lobbying for increased government funding. The CFO explained that it would be good if government funding increased in line with inflation or the funding formula was revised so that Surrey residents got a better deal, but in the meantime, the Precept funding was required to maintain services.
3. A Panel Member asked whether there were any more efficiencies that could realistically be made. The CFO explained

that the medium-term financial strategy (MTFS) predicted the savings that had to be made to reach a balanced budget, rather than savings that could be made. It would be a challenge to meet the target and there would be a number of reviews to support the process. The last resort would service reductions in some areas.

4. In response to questions on the staff vacancy rate, the CFO explained that in 2023/24 the vacancy margin had been increased as a tool used to balance the budget. Ideally, this would be reduced going forward as posts were filled. The plans to address this were at an early stage and the CFO could not comment on which areas would be looked at in 2025/26. This would be on the incoming Chief Constable's agenda. The Panel Member asked whether this had an impact on staff morale. The CFO shared that it had not due to the message that it would only be used a last resort, however, reviews and transformation would be unsettling for staff.
5. A Panel Member asked for assurance that standards would not be lowered when recruiting to meet the uplift target. The PCC explained that His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary published 43 recommendations in November 2022 in relation to vetting. At the time, the PCC went through the recommendations with the team and was reassured that the Force was in a good place with a thorough vetting process. This had been revisited due to recent national events and the National Police Chiefs' Council and the Association of Police and Crime Commissioners were doing a lot of work in this area. There would be a data wash of all officers and staff within the OPCC. The PCC and Deputy Police and Crime Commissioner had also been vetted, despite it not being a requirement.
6. A Panel Member enquired as to how much the Band D Precept would need be increased by to avoid efficiencies which would adversely impact policing. The CFO responded that it was difficult to answer, but he would predict roughly a £34 increase over a four-to-five-year period. This depended on other factors though such as, demand levels and government funding.
7. A Panel Member questioned which services commissioned by the PCC would receive less funding due to the £44,000 cut to the budget in 2023/24. The CFO explained that it was a small percentage decrease in funding, and it would not result in one particular charity or organisation losing out, as the projects that were funded changed on an annual basis. At the Panel's next

meeting, there would be a presentation on the commissioning plan for 2023/24.

8. A Panel Member queried the ratio of non-police staff to police staff and how that compared with neighbouring authorities. The CFO explained that he would need to check following the meeting, however, he believed that the Force was made up of just over 50% police officers and just under 50% police staff. Some Forces had not gone down the route of civilisation and had a greater proportion of police officers. The benefits of the skill of police staff would be lost in coming years due to the national shift towards maintenance of police officers.
9. A Panel Member asked how vacancies would be financially managed through requiring a 10% police staff pay saving at portfolio chief officer level. The CFO explained that the vacancy margin would be held at a corporate level, rather than allocating it to individual departments. This allowed more strategic decisions regarding recruitment, and which posts to fill, to be made.
10. Cllr John Furey was unable to vote but noted his support for the proposed Precept.
11. The Chairman put the recommendation to a vote. The recommendation was carried, with eight votes for, two votes against, and no abstentions.

RESOLVED:

The Surrey Police and Crime Panel recommends that –

1. That the Surrey Police and Crime Commissioner Precept for a Band D property be increased by £15, from £295.57 to £310.57, in 2023/24.

Actions/requests for further information:

1. **R3/23** – The Chief Finance Officer to provide data on the ratio of non-police staff to police staff for Surrey and neighbouring authorities.

16/23 PERFORMANCE MEETINGS [Item 9]

Witnesses:

Lisa Townsend, Surrey Police and Crime Commissioner

Nathan Rees, Head of Communication and Engagement (OPCC)

Key points raised in the discussion:

1. A Panel Member noted that the consultation on the budget and Precept included a question on residents' priorities for policing and asked whether the PCC thought the responses supported the current priorities of her Police and Crime Plan. The Head of Communication and Engagement explained that the top three priorities in the responses of the consultation were burglary, neighbourhood crime, and anti-social behaviour. 25% of the responses included violence against women and girls. A report would be produced based on the consultation responses which could be shared with the Panel. The PCC added that the consultation was a small element of the input she received about the Plan and would not make any changes to it based on those responses alone.
2. A Panel Member asked whether the PCC had any concerns about complaints handling within the Force and the number of complaints received, based off a recent news article on the topic. The Head of Communication and Engagement clarified that there were inaccuracies in how the data was presented in the article. It included the number of overall complaints received; it was not the number of misconduct cases. If a complaint included multiple elements, these would be recorded as separate complaints. The Force released a robust response and explanation to the article as well.

RESOLVED:

The Panel noted the report.

16/23 PCC FORWARD PLAN AND KEY DECISIONS [Item 10]

Witnesses:

Lisa Townsend, Surrey Police and Crime Commissioner

Alison Bolton, Chief Executive (OPCC)

Key points raised in the discussion:

1. A Panel Member queried what the item called 'update allowance scheme' was about. The Chief Executive explained that it was a review conducted on an annual basis which looked at the allowance scheme that covered staff associated with the OPCC and sets out what allowances they could access and claim.

RESOLVED:

The Panel noted the report.

17/23 COMMISSIONER'S QUESTION TIME [Item 11]

Witness:

Lisa Townsend, Surrey Police and Crime Commissioner

Key points raised in the discussion:

1. A Panel Member queried why the Commissioner thought it was an appropriate time to commission a review of whether to use her statutory power to take over responsibility for Surrey Fire and Rescue Service. The PCC explained that she had been involved in ongoing conversations with Ministers and the Home Office about their views and this was the right time. The Council was aware of this, and the PCC clarified that it was about governance, rather than operational collaboration.
2. A Panel Member asked whether the PCC had her own view on the best governance arrangements. The PCC explained that currently it was up to each individual PCC, however, the Government may decide to mandate it, and this was one of the reasons why the PCC wanted to conduct the review now. The PCC felt that the current governance arrangements were not as good as they could be.
3. A Panel Member queried whether this would result in a Precept for each service. The PCC explained that this was likely, and the Panel would become joint as well.

18/23 COMPLAINTS RECEIVED SINCE THE LAST MEETING [Item 12]

Key points raised in the discussion:

1. None.

RESOLVED:

The Panel noted the report.

19/23 RECOMMENDATIONS TRACKER AND FORWARD WORK PROGRAMME [Item 13]

Witnesses:

Lisa Townsend, Surrey Police and Crime Commissioner

Alison Bolton, Chief Executive (OPCC)

Kelvin Menon, Chief Finance Officer (OPCC)

Key points raised in the discussion:

1. A Panel Member requested a paper on staff vacancy rates and their distribution across the Force. The Chief Finance Officer agreed that a paper on this could come to the next Panel meeting.
2. A Panel Member requested for the funding formula for CCTV to be reshared as per R25/22 on the tracker. The Chief Executive responded that it would be shared soon, and it could be combined with responding to a question about the budget for CCTV at the Finance Sub-Group.
3. A Panel Member requested an item on unauthorised encampments. The PCC confirmed that the Panel would receive a presentation on that.

20/23 DATE OF THE NEXT MEETING [Item 14]

The Panel noted that its next meeting would be held on Tuesday, 18 April 2023.

Meeting ended at: 11.47 am

Chairman