

Title: Police and Crime Panel Communications Strategy

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Purpose of Report

This is a discussion paper to introduce a draft Communications Strategy for the Thames Valley Police and Crime Panel. This draft is being presented for Panel members to discuss the key messages, objectives and audiences and to reach agreement on them so the document can be further refined into a workable, rolling communications plan for the Panel.

Context

1. The role of the Thames Valley Police and Crime Panel is to publically hold the Police and Crime Commissioner to account between elections. It is a scrutiny rather than executive function and as such will require the Panel to influence the Police and Crime Commissioner to accept its recommendations.
2. To be effective in its scrutiny role, the Panel will need to consider how it communicates with key stakeholders and the wider public both in the run up to the election of the Commissioner and going forward. The Panel could chose to operate as a 'behind the scenes' committee and meet statutory legal obligations. However, to do so would limit its ability to influence change effectively and represent the views of the residents of the Thames Valley. If stakeholders and the public have no awareness or engagement with the Police and Crime Panel it is not clear why the Police and Crime Commissioner should listen to its views. The document presented provides a plan for how a Communications Strategy can help the Panel to be effective in its role. It is a working draft plan with scope to be expanded and refined as the work and direction of the Panel takes shape.

Issues

3. The following issues will need to be considered in developing and delivering the Communications Strategy.

- **Communications Networks**—Given the limited Home Office funding, the ability of the Police and Crime Panel to communicate effectively will be dependent upon developing strong networks and utilising existing communications channels of Councils and other partners. This requires co-ordination and co-operation from partners. Currently there is limited awareness of the Panel, and one way to address this might be to hold a Thames Valley conference for stakeholders.
- **Media attention**—The Host Authority can issue press releases on behalf of the Police and Crime Panel, however given the size of the Thames Valley area it will have greater impact if Council communications teams locally also promote the work of the Police and Crime Panel where needed. Some ground rules will be needed on media handling to avoid confusion and to maximise impact.
- **Branding**—The Panel will need to consider if and how it wants to brand itself. Branding could help to promote a clear identify of the Panel to stakeholders and residents, as well as reinforce the message that the Panel is for the whole of the Thames Valley not one specific council or area.
- **Website**—Currently information about the Panel is hosted on Buckinghamshire County Council's website (www.buckscc.gov.uk/scrutiny) . Other alternatives might be to host website information on the Thames Valley Police Force or Commissioner's sites, however this might not be helpful in conveying the independence of the Panel's role. A further alternative is for new website to be created for the Panel. Costs for this would need to be met from the Panel's budget (see separate agenda item on the budget).
- **Evaluation**—Measuring the impact of the Communications Strategy is difficult. The level of interest and engagement by stakeholders and the public in the work of the Panel may be one way to explore this, as well as monitoring outputs such as media coverage.

Key Discussion Questions

- 1. What are the Panel's views on the communications objectives identified (see section 4 of the Communications Strategy)?**
- 2. How can the Panel effectively raise understanding and awareness among key stakeholders to help it scrutinise effectively?**
- 3. Does the Panel wish to host an event to help develop a shared understanding of the respective roles and issues of the Panel and PCC following the election of the PCC?**
- 4. Should a communications/media protocol between the Panel and individual local authorities Councils be agreed?**

Next steps

The Draft Communications Strategy will be revised and updated to reflect feedback from the Panel. If agreed, separate communications protocols will be drawn up for the agreement by the Panel as a whole.