

Minutes

Minutes of the Thames Valley Police and Crime Panel held on Friday 21 November 2014, in The Oculus, Aylesbury Vale District Council, The Gateway, Gatehouse Road, Aylesbury. Bucks HP19 8FF, commencing at 11.00 am and concluding at 1.40 pm.

Members Present

Bill Bendyshe-Brown (Wycombe District Council), Noel Brown (Chiltern District Council), Councillor Margaret Burke (Milton Keynes Council), Terry Burke (Independent Co-opted Member), Councillor Anita Cranmer (South Buckinghamshire District Council), Trevor Egleton (Buckinghamshire County Council), Councillor Kieron Mallon (Oxfordshire County Council), Councillor Iain McCracken (Bracknell Forest Council), Councillor Tony Page (Reading Borough Council), Councillor Barrie Patman (Wokingham Borough Council), Pam Pearce (Aylesbury Vale District Council), Councillor Mohammed Sharif (Slough Borough Council), Councillor Dee Sinclair (Oxford City Council), Councillor Quentin Webb (West Berkshire Council) and Councillor Michael Welply (South Oxfordshire District Council)

Officers Present

Reece Bowman, Helen Fincher and Clare Gray

Others Present

Christopher Anstey (Country and Landowners Association), Anthony Aston (Chairman of Bucks Local Branch NFU), Alan Baldwin (Thames Valley Police), Anthony Stansfeld (Thames Valley Police and Crime Commissioner), Ian Thompson (CFO and Deputy Chief Executive), Ruth Vigor-Hedderly and Mitchell Phillips Wright (Youth Council)

Apologies

Councillor Mark Booty (West Oxfordshire District Council), Councillor Jesse Grey (Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead), Councillor Bill Jones (Vale of White Horse District Council), Councillor George Reynolds (Cherwell District Council) and Vacancy

1. Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest. Mr Iain McCracken introduced Mr Mitchell Phillips Wright from the Youth Council who was shadowing him.

2. Minutes

The Minutes of the Meeting held on 19 September 2014 were agreed as a correct record.

The Vice-Chairman referred to recommendation 5 relating to Female Genital Mutilation and asked Members if they had put a motion to their Council to raise awareness. He was pleased to report that Cherwell District Council had debated this issue and supports the PCC in his actions.

Reference was made to page 7 of the minutes (bullet point 5) which referred to the Policy Development Manager at the OPCC giving Members a briefing on rehabilitation programmes and that this should be added to the Work Programme.

3. Public Question Time

There were no public questions. The Chairman reported that the procedure for public questions would be highlighted on the Panel's website.

4. Themed Item - Rural Crime

The themed item for this meeting related to rural crime. The Panel had received an update on the steps being taken in respect of rural crime at their meeting held in July 2014.

The Police and Crime Commissioner (PCC) reported that rural crime covered a wide area including serious organised crime and wide scale intimidation including slavery, people trafficking, firearms and metal theft. It was an area he took seriously and was a Strategic Objective.

The Chairman introduced some local subject experts who were attending this meeting to discuss rural crime:-

Christopher Anstey – Buckinghamshire Branch of the Country and Landowners Association

Anthony Aston – Chairman Aylesbury Branch of the National Farmers Union

Ruth Vigor-Hedderly – Green Yard Policy in Chilterns and South Bucks

Anthony Aston made the following comments on rural crime:-

- Thames Valley Police had helped decrease rural crime through their targeted initiatives.
- He referred back to the Hunting Act 2004 which was a time when there were mindless acts being carried out in the countryside. Since then farmers have been threatened and machines stolen, often at night and some farmers live in fear.
- Farmwatch is a network which has been set up to keep an eye on criminal activity in the countryside.
- CCTV has been used in problem areas and there is also an emergency helpline.
- Dogwatch is another organisation which targets criminals who steal dogs to order.
- It was crucial to have close liaison with the Police Community Support Officer and provide them with as much detail as possible.
- Farmers have been informed about the best way to keep their machinery secure with mobile cameras, gates and barriers and there is a trackable assets system.
- A machine can be moved to Europe within 24 hours and some vehicles cost approximately £150,000. Some gangs are highly organised.

Christopher Anstey made the following comments on rural crime:-

- Thames Valley Police have been very supportive to the Country and Landowners Association.
- They have made a huge improvement to rural crime but it was important not to be complacent.
- With reducing budgets in future year's rural crime should remain a priority. The PCSO's provided amazing support to rural areas.
- Phoning 101 or 999 provided immediate police action.
- There were still concerns about hare coursing and deer poaching which was increasing.
- He also referred to machines and trailers being taken abroad to be sold.
- Anything suspicious should be reported to the police.
- Livestock were also stolen.

Ruth Vigor Hedderly, Cabinet Member for Transportation (BCC) had set up the Green Yard Policy with Sergeant Lucy Price from Iver Police Station. The initiative had started with concern about horses stranded on the highway. The Police could spend a long time chasing horses which took them away from other police work. They therefore set up this initiative where abandoned horses were first identified, where there would be a direct dialogue with the owner. If they were not initially identified they had 14 days to come forward and claim the horse and they would have to pay to have the horse returned. If the horse was in a poor condition they would be destroyed otherwise if they were not claimed they would be rehomed. The initiative had been extremely successful in South Buckinghamshire and some constant offenders were paying up to £500-600 per horse and they were looking to roll this scheme out across the Thames Valley. Surrey were also looking at adopting this policy.

Ruth Vigor Hedderly also referred to the amount of horse tack being stolen often worth £1,000 which took years to accumulate. It was good to have a sign on gates saying Rural Crime Police Aware.

During questioning the following points were noted:-

- There was a recent food scare in the national press referring to illegal slaughter and unsafe uninspected food being supplied. The representative from the National Farmers Union reported that he was aware of this being raised but he was not conscious of this being a widescale local problem.
- A question was asked about the base for organised crime and the routes used. Some organised crime could be based in the cities and towns and gangs travel into the countryside or they could be based outside towns or cities. There was a relationship between urban and rural crime but it was not the same in every area.
- The Assistant Chief Constable who was Chairman of the Rural Crime Steering Group reported that there had been significant improvements in rural crime and the different types of crime impacted on the rural community in different ways. The Group had highlighted a number of priority areas.
- In terms of hare coursing gangs can travel from out of the county and obtain a substantial amount of money for dogs to chase hares. Farmers find it difficult to confront the gangs as they are often violent and use firearms. Eradicating hares was not good for biodiversity. They were also difficult to catch in the act of hare coursing and having evidence of a dead animal.
- There were different types of deer, some of which were highly prized for hunting. Weapons used to kill deer included cross bows and centre pin rifles. Use of firearms at night was especially frightening.
- There were livestock thefts with animals being slaughtered and butchered. Up to 200-300 sheep could disappear. The Assistant Chief Constable reported that this was not a significant issue for the Thames Valley but was causing concern in other areas such as North Wales who had an action plan to address this.
- Countryside Watch Notices were a good deterrent and community awareness was key.
- A Member expressed concern about emphasis on smaller crimes in the rural community, which should be prevented by the farmers through proper protection of their property and that other crimes such as slavery and people trafficking should be addressed. In response it was noted that rural crime was a serious issue from a number of aspects including stealing valuable machinery using violence and firearms by organised crimes.
- A question was asked about how crime was analysed. The Assistant Chief Constable referred to a number of initiatives including the Automatic Number Plate Recognition (ANPR) Scheme and working with Surrey in employing an analyst to draw a picture of data intelligence which for example, had led them to track down a gang committing crimes in different Force areas.
- A Member asked about the use of cameras. The Assistant Chief Constable reported that ANPR was a good scheme to use in the countryside but cameras were more difficult as they needed to be moved around frequently and positioned in the right place to catch travelling gangs.
- Reference was made to working with other agencies, particularly animal welfare associations. Ruth Vigor Hedderly reported that they work with the Horse Trust in Speen who have taken in abandoned horses and rehomed them. There was also an organisation called Horse Watch and horses could also be freeze marked so that they could be recognised. Each Force had a Police Wildlife Liaison Officer who liaised with organisations such as RSPB, RSPCA and a site visit could be arranged if required.
- Since 2009 legislation has required that all horses should be micro chipped and have a passport; horses cannot be registered unless this has taken place. If difficult horses were stolen and could not be sold they were often abandoned. The PCC referred to a serious incident where a donkey had smashed through a car windscreen and caused serious damage to a lady in the car.

- Ruth Vigor Hedderly also expressed concern about young children driving horses along the highway which was often extremely dangerous. The police had currently little power to address this because of an antiquated law but she was looking at developing a new policy to stop this taking place.
- The representative from Milton Keynes reported that they had not received enough data from Thames Valley Police on rural crime in order to complete their Annual Report. The Assistant Chief Constable reported that they have a clear definition of rural crime but they had introduced a new crime system which was bedding down currently. He would investigate why the data was not being submitted.
- A Member referred to the international element of organised crime and how Thames Valley Police were working with police abroad. The Assistant Chief Constable reported that they were working with Europol, European Policing Agency and Interpol. There was a new body set up by the Government to look into international and domestic crime.
- In terms of funding the Green Yard Policy, this was run by a company as a private enterprise. It had been difficult to find suitable premises to run Green Yard because of the need for tight security and there was no requirement for extra funding.
- The Deputy PCC asked Ruth Vigor Hedderly how PCSO's contributed to this area of work. Ruth Vigor Hedderly found them extremely valuable as they had time to gather intelligence, communicate at grass roots level and were fundamental to communities providing good value for money. Christopher Anstey also echoed the views regarding PCSO's and their invaluable contribution.
- A question was asked about a new electronic surveillance system which was being piloted. The Assistant Chief Constable reported that there were a number of different technical systems and he was not familiar of one being taken from Devon and Cornwall. He would investigate this further.
- The Assistant Chief Constable reported that the priorities identified by the Rural Crime Steering Group were raves, hare coursing and poaching, theft of quad bikes and organised crime.

The Chairman thanked all the contributors for this item on rural crime, which was an important issue affecting a large proportion of the population. The Panel thanked the PCC for making this one of his strategic objectives and for all the initiatives that were being undertaken. It was important to have a consistent approach across the Thames Valley to rural crime and for the Panel to continue to monitor performance.

5. Frontline Policing Numbers in the Thames Valley

The PCC introduced the item to inform Members on the current plans concerning police officer numbers. The Force has to make savings of £45 million over the next three years against the backdrop of £58m already taken out of the organisation. However, because of new innovative approaches whilst this may mean a reduction in establishment there does not have to be a reduction in the frontline service.

The reduction in establishment is happening nationally across Forces. £45million reduction (£1million equates to approximately 20 police officer posts) was a large amount of savings when huge efficiencies had already been made. Areas such as Automatic Number Plate Recognition, CCTV and forensics were counted as back office services but contributed highly to solving crime so some difficult decisions would have to be taken in the future.

The following points were made during questioning:-

- A Member from Milton Keynes referred to the large population growth in her area and emphasised the need to take this into account when making cuts to police officer numbers. The PCC reported that there was a formula which calculated police numbers however the population was increasing throughout the Thames Valley and there should be an increase of 100 officers per year to account for the increase in population, when in fact they were losing 200 officers.
- Reference was made to the Property Asset Management Plan which had referred to a review of Neighbourhood Policing. A Member commented that it was important to make a decision about the use of property in line with the neighbourhood review to ensure effective use of resources. The PCC reassured Members that he had visited every Police Station across the Thames Valley and he was happy with the decisions being taken on these assets, except for one or two areas where he wanted an adequate replacement in place. The Member welcomed the co-ordination of this and that they had not ruled out use of some police stations where concerns had been raised.
- One innovative change was to outsource training into the wider educational market. A Member asked how this would be monitored to see if performance had been impacted. The PCC reported that taking this

decision would save the Force the equivalent of 94 fte officer posts. It would be more cost effective to co-operate with other Forces on this area to generate savings.

- A Member asked whether the precept had been factored into the calculations including the Community Infrastructure Levy and Section 106 funding. The PCC and Chief Finance Officer confirmed that this had been factored into the budget with 1.5% increase in the tax base.
- There was a further discussion about frontline officers. This could be a grey area and could include civilian staff. However, they linked it to direct contact with the public but back office staff, such as CCTV and data analysis staff etc played a key role in reducing crime.
- The PCC was asked about IT systems and whether there would be one system across all Forces. The PCC reported that the responsibility for this lay with the Home Office who were keen to pass this to the PCC Working Group. The PCC in Essex was taking a lead role on this issue but there were a variety of opinions on this subject. Two systems that were being looked at included Athena and Minerva.
- In terms of workforce modernisation a question was asked to the PCC about the merger of blue light services. The PCC reported that some smaller areas were looking into this but it was incredibly difficult to co-ordinate in bigger areas. Some areas were highly unionised and would only be forced to address this if it was mandated by Government. The Ambulance Service also operated in a different way with its triage system. There would need to be some obvious financial benefits before this was taken forward.
- There was further discussion about the workforce modernisation. The PCC referred again to the savings that he needed to make and the difficult decisions about what services were being cut. The Chief Financial Officer referred to 41.4 police officer posts which were being reduced across the organisation. However there was no reduction in net workforce but they were looking at whether a member of police staff could undertake this role rather than police officers.
- In terms of different ways of working was this being pushed in the Force and were there any barriers to this? The PCC reported that there were no barriers to this and they were moving to technology like ipads etc. so police officers could work effectively without going back to police stations. Work was being undertaken on communications with Hampshire (and SE Police). Security implications and access to systems were an issue which could be solved but did need careful handling. There was a Digital Policing Working Group which was run jointly with Hampshire looking at mobile technology such as body worn videos and digital case files. With digital files information could be uploaded by the police officer which could be used as evidence by the Crown Prosecution Service. There was a two year programme to bring Wi-Fi into courts.
- In terms of body worn video's Thames Valley was one of the first forces to use this technology. They have 340 but there was more funding for this area.
- In terms of Community Safety Partnership funding the PCC spent more money in this area than the average of all other PCCs.
- In terms of the budget the PCC reported that he was glad he had raised the precept by 2%. The PCC in Surrey is considering going for a 25% increase and would have to go to a referendum; the increase may be kept at 1.5%.
- With Community Safety Partnership funding there will be a slight shave on this funding for 2015/16 to pay for a software system.

The Chairman reported that frontline policing was a major issue and they were aware of the complexities regarding the definition of frontline staff. The numbers of frontline staff were uncertain in future years and the Budget Task and Finish Group will look at this and make recommendations.

6. Operation Bullfinch - Six monthly update

An update was given to the Panel on Operation Bullfinch, which is the operational name for the Police/Council investigation that focussed on offences related to the sexual exploitation of a number of vulnerable girls, in Oxford from 2004 onwards. The PCC reported that the response to child sexual exploitation (CSE) remained a complex issue and tactics and responses are developing across the Country. He also expressed concern about Female Genital Mutilation.

During discussion the following points were noted:-

- A Member referred to the work of Oxfordshire County Council in addressing child sexual exploitation. There was a joint team called 'Kingfisher' which was based at Cowley Police Station whose aim was to safeguard children who were being sexually exploited or are at risk of sexual exploitation.

- There were currently 16 cases under review and the Panel welcomed the transparent way that the Police Force are dealing with this issue.
- Reference was made to a Government video on this area and the different types of female genital mutilation. The PCC reported that levels 2 and 3 are against the law but level 1 was more difficult to define. The whole area of FGM was a matter of education.
- In terms of item 5 of the Child Sexual Exploitation Action Plan and ensuring police officers are trained to a minimum standard on safeguarding so that they can recognise children at risk of CSE a Member expressed concern that they were not trained to a reasonable standard. The PCC reported that the key word was that they could recognise children at risk so that they could refer this issue to people who were qualified. Often junior officers were not experts in particular areas but if they were able to recognise issues then they could be referred to specialist units such as the Multi Agency Safeguarding Hubs. The Buckinghamshire, Oxfordshire and Milton Keynes MASHs were launched in September 2014, with Reading and Slough following next year. A Member reported that there were a large number of children at risk, who were not all in care and that standards of training were important to identify this at an early stage. The PCC reported that he did recognise the risks and that some children were difficult to control. For example one child in care went missing 100 times. The MASH were vital in identifying any concerns at an early stage through good partnership working.
- The Chairman suggested that there should be a site visit for Panel Members to the MASH in the Thames Valley and in addition it would be helpful to have an officer speak at a Panel meeting about their work.
- A Member expressed concern that the action plan performance indicators were all green and therefore they may not be stretching targets. The PCC reported that there had been a huge amount of effort to set up the MASH and therefore the green indicators showed the actions taken. However, he did have concerns that some areas of the Thames Valley were not reporting child sexual exploitation which was difficult to address.
- Reference was made to the Female Genital Mutilation recommendations made by the Panel and a Member asked that a brief update be given at the next meeting of the Panel on how Councils have responded to the FGM issue and what actions are being taken to address this across the Thames Valley.

The PCC was thanked for his update report.

7. Complaints, Integrity and Ethics Panel Update

The Chairman reported that the PCC was one of the first to establish a Complaints, Integrity and Ethics Panel. There are currently eight independent Members on the Panel with one vacancy and the Panel meets every two months. The Deputy Chairman is an Independent Member and the PCC receives a report on the Panel's work after each meeting. The area of complaints was difficult with some people voicing concern about the performance of the IPCC, which was taking money from Forces to fund itself. The PCC commented that the IPCC was supposed to reduce the work of the Professional Standards Department but this was not the case. The Shadow Police Minister did not want the IPCC to continue. Complaints were not dealt with in a satisfactory manner on a national basis but the PCC was pleased with the work of the Panel.

The Deputy PCC who chaired the Panel reported that the Panel was promoting transparency and independence and the independent Members selected their own Deputy Chairman. After each meeting a summary and action plan was fed back to the PCC, Chief Constable and Audit Committee. The Panel was being used as an example of good practice.

During discussion the following points were raised:-

- A Member asked how many complaints were handled at each meeting. The Deputy PCC reported that there were approximately ten complaints and the complaint files were scrutinised by Members. Following discussion there may be recommendations and actions arising from the meeting.
- A Member asked what recommendations were being made at the Panel. The Panel is different from the Police Authority Complaints Panel as it looks at the wider ethics/integrity issues. The PCC reported that they were unable to make them public because the complaints were confidential but if there were any wider issues coming out of the discussion they would be reported to the Panel.
- The Deputy Chairman invited one of the Panel Member's to observe the meeting. However, it was not a public meeting as it looked at individual complaints

The Chairman thanked the PCC and Deputy PCC for their report.

8. General Issues

The following general issues were raised by Members:-

- The PCC would like to see GPS tagging being used on people who came out of prison and suggested that it should be a condition of bail.
- A Member expressed concern about the transparency regarding the closure of neighbourhood police stations. The PCC reported that if she was aware of any specific issues she should discuss this with him. With closing police stations there was the operational need to do so weighing against public perception; the public were usually protective about their own local police stations.
- Reference was made to the headlines regarding terrorism issues in High Wycombe. The PCC reported that this was concerning. There was a large Muslim population in High Wycombe. Some people could be taken in by fundamentalist/radical preaching. If people become radicalised they could be dangerous. This emphasised the importance of neighbourhood policing and having local intelligence. A Member asked about preventing radicalisation and the PCC reported that the law was weak in this area and it was difficult to provide evidence and go against freedom of speech. The Member from Slough reported that work was being undertaken by the Community Cohesion Group who were liaising with Community Leaders. The PCC reported that preventative work was also being undertaken in High Wycombe and other areas.
- A Member referred to crime reporting and particularly expressed concern that sex crimes were not reported. The PCC reported that Thames Valley was in the top quartile in terms of integrity of data. However it was a subjective area particularly with issues such as domestic violence and rape. Cases have been withdrawn because of bringing evidence to court.
- The PCC was asked if he had been out in a police car at night. The PCC reported that he had recently been in Reading, Windsor and Maidenhead late at night and also Oxford. There were a lot of alcohol issues.
- Following on from this question a Member referred to the difficulties in deciding if a crime had been committed and whether this led to complaints. The PCC commented that very few of them resulted in complaints; some of them however could be justified. He referred to a report which stated that the Thames Valley Police Chief Officer's Team provides ethical working practices including crime reporting which is understood at senior levels but not with frontline officers. This needs to be addressed and action was being taken. However, they were not in the bottom quartile like Hampshire Constabulary.
- A Member who had experience in security referred to dealing with crime in cities. Some police officers need to make judgemental decisions very quickly in dangerous situations. This requires attention to detail and supervision. This is one area that the Panel could look at in detail to see if the PCC was achieving his aims. The PCC provided brief information on one investigation he knew about which supported the Members experience and concerns. The PCC emphasised the need to look at these cases in a timely fashion.

9. Work Programme

The Work Programme was noted.

The Chairman of the Partnership Task and Finish Group, Iain McCracken reported that the Group had met and would be undertaking a survey of partner organisations to look at partnership working with the PCC.

Terry Burke, Chairman of the Complaints Panel reported that this was his last meeting as he was moving out of the Thames Valley area. The Panel thanked him for his invaluable contribution as an independent Member and for his work with the Complaints Panel. Rajinder Sohpal had also resigned so the Panel would need to recruit two new Independent Members. Panel Members were asked if they would be interested to sit on the interview panel for recruiting new Members or to sit on the Complaints Panel.

10. Date and Time of Next Meeting

30 January 2015 – 11am at South Oxfordshire District Council

CHAIRMAN