

Report to the Thames Valley Police & Crime Panel

Title: Future operation of the Panel

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Panel Effectiveness

Police and crime panels are an essential part of accountability structures for policing and community safety and since this structure was put in place in 2012 there have been a number of documents and conferences looking at how Panels have developed and highlighting good practice.

The **Local Government Association** produced a document looking at the first two years of Panels and highlighted areas where Panels could develop including:-

- Panel resources
- Members having a grounded understanding and experience of scrutiny
- Having a good relationship between the Panel and the PCC
- Transparency of the PCC Office and having access to their Forward Plan
- Scrutiny of commissioned services and collaboration
- Good complaint handling

Frontline Consulting and Grant Thornton have recently published a document called Power Check which reviews the effectiveness of police accountability for Panels second term. A summary of the document is attached as an appendix but a full copy can be found via this link.

<http://www.pcps-direct.net/pdfs/Power-Check-2pp-summary.pdf>

<http://www.pcps-direct.net/pdfs/Power-Check-Reviewing-the-effectiveness-of-police-accountability.pdf>

The top three barriers to effectiveness from a Panel's point of view were as follows:-

- Limited powers
- Panel budget
- Timeliness and availability of information supplied

From a PCC's point of view it was:-

- Staffing support to the Panel
- Limited powers
- Political allegiances

Areas of good practice (including the Thames Valley one!):-

- In depth look at individual strategic objectives in the Police and Crime Plan
- Themed Panel Meetings/items
- Task and Finish Groups on specific areas e.g Victims' Services, Volunteers and Special Constables
- Stakeholder events e.g community safety, domestic violence
- Pro-active scrutiny sessions – evidence gathering sessions which include contributions from the PCC, key partners stakeholders and the public
- Networking - Engaging other Panels and Scrutiny bodies to keep abreast of emerging good practice

The summary also includes recommendations for effective working which includes the following:-

Stakeholder engagement

- Challenge/support - Panels should gauge PCC perceptions of the balance of their work periodically and use that to inform self assessments of their effectiveness throughout their term.
- Enhanced profile – Panels should use 'soft influence' and develop a common focus underpinned by a communications strategy. The report says that "the more interest a Panel can generate from the public, the more influence and impact it is likely to have on the PCC's decision making and actions". Setting the right topics could include issues that are more aligned to public concerns and responding swiftly to current issues affecting the PCC.
- Ensuring a range of skills, knowledge and experience – Panels should be clear about the purpose of their work and undertake a short skills audit to identify gaps across the membership.

Workstream Planning

- Structured work programme of proactive scrutiny
- Briefings by the OPCC and PCC on their work
- Co-planning with the OPCC
- Dedicated link officer at the OPCC to engage with the Panel

Member Development

- Training
- Induction
- Having champions for different issues within the Panel

Learning and Development Session with Thames Valley Police and Crime Panel

Areas of good practice already being carried out by the Panel

- Sub-Committees/Task and Finish Groups
- Themed items and building up a network of external witnesses
- Good working relationship with the PCC
- Members were happy with the approach to Key Lines of Enquiry but asked for it to be sent out earlier.

Key barriers to effectiveness

- Geography – In terms of Membership it is up to constituent Authorities to nominate Panel Members but because of the political make up of the Thames Valley political balance is not achievable. One way to address this is recruiting independent Members but because of the size of the Thames Valley, there are only two spaces. It is also difficult to find a venue accessible to all.
- Geography also impacts on public engagement.
- Resources and Member time limited with other roles and responsibilities e.g Cabinet Members/Chairmen
- Limited resources in the Force/OPCC office for contributing to scrutiny over and above normal Panel Meeting. The Panel are grateful for the Force and OPCC supporting the Preventing CSE Sub-Committee, Budget and Police and Crime Plan Task and Finish Groups.
- Strategic/operational issues

One important point in the Powercheck report is that whilst Panels should not involve themselves with operational policing decisions, Members are justified in having access to sufficient operational performance information, particularly outcomes, to support effective scrutiny of the PCC's strategic role and performance. In response to this the Panel welcomes the information provided through the PCC's Policy Planning and Performance meetings and the attendance of the Chief Constable to their meetings in order to be reassured that the PCC is holding him to account.

Recommendations on areas for development

Agenda

- Reduced agenda
- More time on agenda for topical issues (previously general issues) – need to look at one specific area in more detail and the rest links for information. Members to email the Scrutiny Officer with specific requests for this item e.g local news articles.
- For future items for the Work Programme Members may wish to think of items that are of interest to the public. However, the public may be more interested in the operational side of policing rather than the strategic side (i.e the scrutiny of, and support for, the decisions and actions of the PCC) and therefore this can cause difficulties with the limited statutory role and powers of the Panel available under the legislation.

Pro-active Scrutiny

- Keep themed meeting approach but make sessions shorter and questions more focused to PCC (However please note alternative options for scrutiny which are undertaken by Hampshire and West Midlands Police and Crime Panel).
- Importance of engaging stakeholders on specific issues – the Panel is looking to have a Working Session on Cyber Crime. One Panel was scrutinising a specific area and held an informal Working Group with key stakeholders before the meeting to ensure they had good Key Lines of Enquiry.

Hampshire visit (7 October)

<http://www3.hants.gov.uk/hampshire-pcp/pcc-proactivescrutiny.htm>

Hampshire Police and Crime Panel undertakes a proactive scrutiny session after their formal Panel Meeting (four times a year). Examples of areas they have looked at include domestic abuse, CSE, Anti Social Behaviour and Modern Slavery. Hampshire have a Police and Crime Plan Working

Group which terms of reference also include drafting and leading the work programme for proactive scrutiny sessions.

Their proactive scrutiny sessions include:-

- Inviting written evidence from a range of stakeholders who may be able to assist the Panel with their proactive scrutiny. Five questions (which are agreed by the Plan Working Group) are put to stakeholders and they are given five-six weeks to respond. So for example questions could include how effective is the PCC support to victims, examples of successful approaches and priorities for action.
- Provide a webpage for the session, giving information on the session including relevant documents and to provide a channel through which the public can make comments.
- Invite key witnesses to attend oral evidence sessions at the meeting – this could include the PCC, OPCC, representative from the Force, and two stakeholders who supplied written evidence.
- Members go into a private session to discuss recommendations and the outcome of this is communicated by a report which is published on the Panel website and then responded to by the PCC.

Another example of proactive scrutiny is West Midlands Police and Crime Panel who undertake mini inquiries which include evidence gathering sessions over one or two days. The last Inquiry looked at community safety funding.

<http://westmidlandspcp.co.uk/publications/>

Performance monitoring

- Ensuring Panel recommendations agreed by the PCC are being implemented by the PCC
- Re-emphasise the importance of Members reporting back to their Councils on work undertaken by the Panel and/or Panel recommendations to be implemented by their Councils.

Members

- To undertake a skills audit of Members to ensure that Member skills were being utilised in specific areas of work across the Panel
- Members to consider whether they wish to refresh the rapporteur system where Members were a champion for a specific area and made annual reports to the Panel or took a lead when this area was being discussed e.g victims commissioning, emergency services and estates strategy
- Effective questioning - More flexibility and better use of supplementary questions

Communication

- Ensuring good communications around scrutiny and press releases after relevant meetings to show how the Panel has made a difference
- Members were not wholly supportive of webcasting as they thought it would not be taken up by the public and stifled debate at the Panel.
- Revisit website – Hampshire has a good model
- Whether regular briefings with the OPCC would add value to the work of the Panel

Sub Committees and Working Groups

To be held in accessible venues

Budget Task and Finish Group

- Possible extra session for Budget Task and Finish Group to include refresh on financial training.
- Shared responsibility of the report to the Panel
- To consider whether to have regular meetings of the Task and Finish Group across the year including budget monitoring

Police and Crime Plan

- Setting up of Working Group should enable the Plan to be more robustly scrutinised.
- Need to challenge on good performance information
- Ensure good communications around scrutiny of the Plan.

Complaints Sub-Committee

This area was not discussed at this session. The Home Office have not yet responded to the original complaints consultation in relation to possible changes in process for the Panel – this response is awaited before any changes are made to the process

Preventing CSE Sub-Committee

This was not specifically discussed but Members were positive about its work. The Chairman has asked for an item to be included on the next agenda to discuss having a focused Work Programme with outcomes.

RECOMMENDED

That the Panel discuss the areas for improvement above and discuss which areas they would like to take forward.