

Thames Valley Police and Crime Panel minutes

Minutes of the meeting of the Thames Valley Police and Crime Panel held on Friday 26 January 2024 in Thames Valley Police Training Centre, Sulhamstead (Reading RG7 4Dx), commencing at 11.10 am and concluding at 1.30 pm.

Members present

Councillor Robin Bradburn (Milton Keynes City Council) (Chairman), Councillor Karen Rowland (Reading Borough Council) (Vice-Chairman), Councillor Peter Brazier (Buckinghamshire Council - co-optee), Councillor Isobel Darby (Buckinghamshire Council co-optee), Councillor Sam Casey-Rerhaye (South Oxfordshire District Council), Councillor Neil Fawcett (Vale of White Horse District Council), Peter Gammond (Co-Opted Independent Member), Councillor Iskandar Jefferies (Bracknell Forest Council), Pamela Mackenzie-Reilly (Co-opted Independent Member), Councillor Keith McLean (Milton Keynes City Council - co-optee), Councillor Stephen Newton (Wokingham Borough Council), Councillor Vicky Poole (West Berkshire Council), Councillor Geoff Saul (West Oxfordshire District Council), Councillor Mabu Shaik (Slough Borough Council) and Councillor Simon Werner (Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead)

Others in attendance

Khalid Ahmed (Scrutiny Officer) and Matthew Barber (Thames Valley Police and Crime Commissioner).

Agenda Item

33 Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were submitted by Cllr Carroll (Buckinghamshire Council), Cllr Culverhouse (Buckinghamshire Council – co-optee), Cllr Lygo (Oxford City Council) and Cllr Webber (Oxfordshire County Council).

34 Minutes

The Minutes of the meeting held on 3 November 2023 were agreed as a correct record.

35 Public Question Time

Cllr Andrew Gant of Oxfordshire County Council asked the PCC the following question:

Thames Valley police action on road safety appears to be behind what we see from other forces and are hearing from other local authorities. Other police forces seem to be more willing and able to implement continuous operation and average speed camera enforcement.

Other forces are using cycle and bus patrols to detect and deter mobile phone use

and illegal or fake number plates. It is generally recognised that stopping drivers for driving and vehicle offences often uncovers other serious crimes, and that third party reporting is well encouraged. This can help improve overall driver behaviour and road safety.

It is understood that resources are limited, but inaction will cost more than action in the long run. The PCC was asked for TVP to act against this increasing trend of dangerous driving before there are more tragic consequences. The specific request was for closer collaboration with local authorities, both collectively across the Thames Valley area, and individually to help achieve improvements to road safety.

The PCC was asked to acknowledge the benefits and value of lower speed limits, especially the 20-mph scheme, and to support local authorities by enforcing them. In addition to appreciate the advantages of average speed camera enforcement and to cooperate with Oxfordshire County Council, especially on sections of the A34, A40, A420, and A417.

There should also be a crackdown on anti-social driving behaviours such as driving and parking on pavements.

Response

[The PCC replied that he agreed with most of the points raised and recognised, that sadly, that there are often more road accidents at this time of year due to the weather. This year has been particularly bad, with another incident on the A420 last month.

There is often a gap between those factors that can lead to some of the worst casualties and some of the measures that are simple and popular today. Reference was made to not taking enough action on pavement parking, which is a problem in most places now. The PCC said that unless the pavement parking was causing obstruction, it was up to local authorities to deal with pavement parking.

He was meeting in the next week or so with South Oxfordshire Council and residents regarding pavement parking.

The PCC referred to the 13 deaths on road accidents which were tragic. Two were caused by fallen trees on the road, five cases were due to mental health issues and one driver had a heart attack.

Of course, there was the need to address many of the other cases related to drug and drink driving and those particular issues.

Reference was made to a review which was taking place to determine where road policing resources were best placed. There was access to the Road Safety Fund, which is the money generated from the speed awareness courses, funded by speeding drivers.

There had been no final decisions made on much of that funding, as this was being looked at in conjunction with the savings proposal from the Joint Operations Unit.

The PCC referred to more recruitment taking place in the Criminal Justice Team in relation to roads policing and the investigation of third party reports.

There were benefits and challenges of using average speed cameras to enforce speed limits and reduce road accidents in Oxfordshire and other areas. Average speed cameras are more effective than fixed cameras at maintaining traffic flow and preventing drivers from speeding up after passing a camera.

Average speed cameras needed to be installed in locations where speed is a major cause of accidents, and not just where there are high volumes of traffic. Some local authorities have implemented 20mph zones, but there is no funding or suitable technology to enforce them with cameras.

The PCC said he is working with councils and other partners to develop a road safety strategy that will include the use of average speed cameras where appropriate.]

36 Scrutiny of the Proposed Police Precept - Budget Papers from the Performance and Accountability meeting between the PCC and the Chief Constable

The Panel considered the budget papers which were presented to and agreed at the Performance and Accountability meeting between the Police and Crime Commissioner and the Chief Constable on 18 January 2024.

The PCC introduced the item and explained the reasoning behind the proposed £13 (Band D) increase to the Council Tax precept. Reference was made to the PCC's responsibility to ensure that Thames Valley Police has the resources to effectively prevent and investigate crime, support victims and protect communities from harm.

The PCC commented that he was conscious of the current cost of living pressures on households, however, alongside this, economic pressures such as high utility, fuel, and vehicle costs are also continuing to significantly impact policing budgets despite a rise in government funding.

The investment in policing would focus on the priorities that mattered to residents with strengthened neighbourhood policing and crime prevention. The budget included investment in an additional 150 police officers across the force, including neighbourhood officers, priority crime teams to tackle burglaries, theft and shoplifting; and an increase in the Rural Crime Taskforce.

Reference was made to the plans enabling continued investment in programmes to improve forensics, crime investigation, safeguarding and the training of new officers.

In relation to the capital plan, funding would be provided for long-term investment in technology and infrastructure, with sustainable funding support.

The revenue plan is balanced over the four-year timeframe and would be maintained through the ongoing Force Productivity Plan saving £20m in the first two years of the Plan, with the bulk of the savings coming through the Force Review project. There were savings of £7m in 2024/25 which have been identified in detail.

For 2025/26 there was a £13m savings target which had been largely identified at an outline level by department, and detailed plans were being worked through with external expert support.

Members' Questions:

- (1) The PCC was asked about the proposals to reduce the number of officers in the Roads Policing Unit which was concerning as they were a front-line service and the optics of this would not be good.

[The PCC replied that there was no clear decision made on this. There would be a look at what savings could be made in the second year.]

- (2) Reference was made to a later agenda item (Topical Issues) relating to HMICFRS who had sent a warning to TVP after an Inspection highlighted problems with the Domestic Violence Disclosure Scheme (Clare's Law) which included resourcing issues and long delays. Also, the report 'Tools and Strategies for Domestic Abuse', detailing that a number of bids for a centralised team, after a small successful pilot to address the issues with the Domestic Violence Disclosure Scheme ... have been unsuccessful.

The PCC was asked to confirm funding will therefore be made available to address this failing, as highlighted by HMICFRS, to avoid continued reliance on external bidding applications, which have so far been unsuccessful?

[The PCC replied that there was an increase in resourcing although the bidding for funding had been unsuccessful. Regarding the HMICFRS report on safeguarding, they had come back and acknowledged that there had been improvements made.]

In relation to the league table which had been produced in relation to Clare's Law, the PCC said that the stalking comparisons were difficult to compare as they looked at the number of revisits which had been made.]

- (3) The PCC was asked what residents were getting out of their increase in Police precept. There was an increase in the Police precept of funding, with a reduction in government grant and proposed savings of £2m.

[The PCC replied that there had been a sizeable increase in Government funding although with inflationary and other financial pressures caused by the cost-of-living crisis, this had affected budgets. Alongside the proposed £2m savings there was also unidentified growth of around £1m.]

The proposed £13 increase (Band D Council Tax) would generate around £30m; an increase of £10 would be around £3m less.

There would be 150 posts funded out of this increase as part of increased numbers in neighbourhood policing. The move to 5 local command units will enable TVP to put more resource into where the policing demand was with a proactive team focusing on County Lines crimes and Serious Organised Crime.

Reference was made to increasing resource into cybercrime with the increasing digital/ social media crimes and increasing retail crime investigators.]

(4) The PCC was asked about outside agency staff having training?

[The PCC replied that this facility was not used often as it was not practical due to the technicalities.]

(5) Reference was made to TVP's future plans which indicated a reliance and expectation of increases in the Police Precept and that the increased funding would partly pay for more neighbourhood policing. How was the PCC going to be accountable?

[The PCC replied that this was entirely fair. The consensus from the public was that an increase in the Police Precept was welcomed. TVP had 5,000 plus police officers and people wanted visibility in community policing and more Police Community Support Officers (PCSOs). There would be a drive to fill the PCSO vacancies.

Town centre police teams would be more visible and neighbourhood police officers would be doubled. The Rural Crime and Task Force was increasing, and the PCC said he was accountable for all these decisions.]

Written Questions submitted by the Panel's Budget Task and Finish Group

(1) At the first meeting of the Budget Task and Finish Group on 10 November 2023, preparation for the budget was based on a £10 Police precept increase. PCCs were then given flexibility for a £13 Police precept increase. Could the PCC provide full details of what would not be in the budget if the flexible £13 proposal had not been given?

[The PCC replied that the Chief Constable has a very detailed and in depth process for scoring new demands and bids across the priorities of the force and my own. Each proposal has to be sponsored by the appropriate chief officer before it is considered by the wider CCMT. This process provides a priority list of all the new demands.

The Chief Constable then decides where the critical line is drawn and if sufficient funding is not available additional savings would have to be identified to meet these demands. If the £13 precept increase was not available some new demands would

not have been met in conjunction with taking additional savings.

During November and December significant work was undertaken by the GSI team to scrutinise all critical and essential bids to fully justify their ranking and ensure all alternative means of delivery had been explored. Also during this time, the Finance Department was critically analysing all the items within the MTFP especially the inflationary elements to ensure they were based on the latest information and the assumptions were justified. This resulted in a reduction in the inflation provision for 2024/25 of almost £1m along with numerous other updates.

Due to the volume and scope of this additional work there is not a straight read across from November's additional demands to January's. However, November's notional £10 precept increase did not provide sufficient funding for the demands identified at that time.

If I had not approved the £13 precept increase, the shortfall would have to be met by not approving new activity, making additional savings or additional use of reserves.

I reviewed the prioritised list of new activity with the Chief Constable to gain assurance that the proposals are for essential growth. Given the significant savings plans underway, additional savings would be difficult to deliver without disproportionate impact on delivery, particularly in the short term. Additional use of reserves would increase financial risk for future years.]

- (2) How can the PCC justify asking residents of Thames Valley for an increase of Council tax for the Police Precept (Band D - £269.28) during a cost-of-living crisis? Also, there are planned savings as part of the Force Review such as a reduction in Road Policing officers when residents complain about car cruising and meets which impacts on communities? The perception of residents is that they are paying more and receiving less. How can residents be assured that this will not be the case?

[The PCC replied that the MTFP and the Chief Constable letter to myself (appendix 4) sets out how this budget addresses the force priorities and the benefits for our communities including: Improving Victim Services, Improving Public Contact, Strengthening Community Policing and protecting Vulnerable People. This is supported by an additional 150 officer posts, which comes on top of the doubling of neighbourhood officers I funded last year.

The MTFP makes realistic assumptions about future levels of funding and cost increases, along with committed growth items. These assumptions include savings identified as part of the Force Review and wider cross force savings all of which, are part of the overall financing of the MTFP. All savings are considered by the CCMT in the context of the force priorities and service delivery to determine the risks associated with taking them versus the risks attached to not delivering the overarching savings target and hence our priorities. All savings are difficult decisions but without this focus we cannot redistribute our resources to our highest priority

areas.

Road's policing is part of the Joint Operations Unit (JOU). Like all departments, the JOU needs to find savings and identify priorities for additional investment. CCMT has not yet made the decision as to how JOU savings targets are to be met. I will continue to hold the Force to account for roads policing, as I will for all force activity.]

- (3) What environmental and sustainability initiatives, such as solar panels, wind turbines etc are being looked at in terms of a capital strategy which will provide energy savings in the long term?

[The PCC replied that TVP has an Environmental Strategy led by an Environmental & Sustainability manager. Solar Panels are present at 5 sites with additional units coming online in 2025. TVP's strategy regarding solar panels is to review the opportunity for solar panels on new builds and when significant building work is undertaken e.g. roof replacement. Other Opportunities are identified as a need or opportunity arises.]

A Member expressed disappointment with the answer given, as there were long term benefits with renewable energy.

[The PCC responded that TVP were tied into long term energy contracts and there were issues with some of TVP buildings. Reference was made to TVP buildings in Oxfordshire where decisions needed to be taken on which buildings were to be retained. There was no capital available on some of the environmental initiatives.]

- (4) Recruitment and retention within TVP remains very high on the risk registers of the force and impacts on the budget. Could the PCC outline what are the financial implications of on average 44 officers leaving every month and what is being done to reduce this, particularly with the costs involved in training officers and the gaps in the service to the public this creates?

[The Panel was informed, as of the end of November the average TVP leavers was 39 per month, significantly higher than wanted. A high turnover of police officers affects virtually every aspect of the force for example, by increasing the need for recruitment, training initial and specialist, mentoring taking skilled officers away from the frontline, decreasing the skills and knowledge of those officers available for deployment as the average length of service decreases, decreasing the number of officers available for deployment because more are in the training process. As well as the direct additional costs of travelling, accommodation, and subsistence for those in training.

The Force is tackling this problem by multiple means, for example, we have introduced face to face interviews before our new recruits join us to ensure both from our perspective and theirs, that they are right for the force and the force is right for them. This will reduce the number of new recruits resigning early in their career. The 1st tranche of 42 interviews resulted in 6 no shows and 3 not progressed. We

have a retention team who are focused on “problem solving / intervening at an early stage to address issues and keep officers within their teams.”]

- (5) A particular issue amongst all Police Forces is officers can retire at a relatively young age. Is there any opportunity to look at retaining some of the officers with inducements which will retain the experience they possess?

[The PCC replied that the retirement age for Police officers is now 60 (increased from 50 and 55). The Force (as is true of most forces) has a 30+ scheme whereby officers can retire, take their lump sum, and then return to work on their previous grade, their annual pension is abated.

This local scheme is being replaced imminently with a new national NPCC scheme “Retire and Return” which provides more flexibility for the force and the officer.

We also employ a number of retired officers on zero hours contracts so we can call upon their skills and knowledge as and when required for specific cases. We also encourage retiring officers to apply for police staff roles.]

- (6) Reference was made to £2m of unidentified savings and the PCC was asked for more information on this.

[The PCC referred to appendix 4 which explains how the £2m unidentified savings is matched by an equal and opposite provision for unidentified essential growth. This is to indicate that any additional growth will need to be funded by additional savings. If the savings cannot be found the growth cannot be delivered. The £2m additional growth is low compared to recent years.]

- (7) This budget relies heavily on the use of reserves to support the funding of one-off short-term growth and investment items. How sustainable is this, particularly if reserves are dipped into to cover items such as energy costs and inflation going forward?

[The PCC explained that General Reserves are maintained at the CIPFA recommended level of 2.5% - 3% of NRE. Reserves are only used to fund one-off items or items of an exceptional nature such as the energy spike.

The Improvement & Performance reserves is designed to support the force in developing for the future, building the force for the future. This reserve is designed for application to benefit the force service and not a saving mechanism, i.e. the intention is not to build the reserve but to use it for the benefit of the service. This year I have agreed to support the force in the use of this reserve to support a number of long-term investment opportunities such as the Force Review which is designing the structures and delivery mechanisms to provide flexibility to address the current and future policing challenges and complexities. Other one-off investments include the Network modernisation and response to the BT transformation work.

The Force also has an Estates Reserve which the MTFP contribute to with the expectation of the current and potential schemes within the Estates Strategy.

The significant productivity savings over the next two years mean that short term use of reserves is sustainable. My CFO and myself are confident that the force is making reasonable and appropriate use of the I&P reserves.]

The decision taken on this item was made after the Panel considered the following item on the agenda:- Report of the Budget Task and Finish Group.

RESOLVED – (1) That the Police and Crime Panel approve the Police and Commissioner’s precept for 2024/25, to increase the Council Tax precept by £13 (Band D), as set out in the OPCC budget papers.

(2) That, subject to final tax base notifications, the council tax requirement for 2024/25 be set at £262,294,520.

(3) That any variation in the final amount of council tax income be appropriated to or from the Improvement & Performance Reserve.

(4) That the revenue estimates for 2024/25 as set out in Appendix be noted.

(5) That the police element of the council tax for 2024/25 be set at £269.28 for properties in Band D (an annual increase of £13), with the charge for other bands as set out in Table 1, for comparison Appendix 2 shows the comparison band D precept across all forces.

Property Band	Relevant Proportion	PCC Element of the Council Tax
A	6/9	£179.52
B	7/9	£209.44
C	8/9	£239.36
D	9/9	£269.28
E	11/9	£329.12
F	13/9	£388.96
G	15/9	£448.80
H	18/9	£538.56

37 Report of the Panel's Budget Task and Finish Group

As in previous years, the Thames Valley Police & Crime Panel formed a Budget Task & Finish Group to assist in discharging its statutory duty to scrutinise the Police &

Crime Commissioner (PCC) for Thames Valley's proposed Council Tax precept for 2024/25.

On 10 November 2023, the Budget Task and Finish Group met with the Director of Finance of Thames Valley Police (TVP) and the Chief Finance Officer of the Office of the PCC to look at draft budget proposals. Summary of that meeting is attached as appendix C to the report.

Members of the PCP Budget Task and Finish Group attended the Performance and Accountability meeting between the PCC and the Chief Constable of Thames Valley Police (TVP) on 18 January 2024, and then held their Budget Task and Finish Group the following day on 19 January 2024 to scrutinise the budget proposals.

Councillor Bradburn, the Chair of the Budget Task and Finish Group presented the report. He thanked Martin Thornley, Chief Finance Officer, Office of PCC and Linda Waters, Director of Finance, TVP for attending the Task and Finish Group meetings and outlining the PCC's draft budget proposals and the implications of this on the Police Precept.

The recommendation of the Budget Task and Finish Group was to approve the Police and Crime Commissioner's police precept for 2024/25, to increase the Council Tax police precept by £13 (Band D), as set out in the OPCC budget report.

38 Thames Valley Police Contact Management update

The Panel considered a report of the PCC which provided an update on Thames Valley Police call handling performance. It included current positioning, challenges the department are currently facing, and measures being put in place to mitigate future risk and improve performance.

Reference was made to Call handling performance being impacted by three main influencing factors:- the volume of incoming demand, the stability of IT and telephony systems used, and resourcing.

The PCC reported that in the last 12 months there have seen fluctuations in IT reliability and call demand, particularly in relation to the 'android' upgrade to mobile phones which saw a spike in 999 calls in error during the summer months (pocket calls). However, the greatest challenge has come from resourcing availability.

In response to a question regarding a recent outage, the PCC reported that 999 calls to TVP were down for 3 ½ hours. The outage was down to human error and a kit failure. Contingency was that calls were diverted to Hampshire Constabulary, and this worked very well.

RESOLVED – That the report be noted, and it was agreed that a further update report be programmed into the Panel's work programme.

39 Tools and strategies for dealing with Domestic Abuse

The PCC submitted a report which provided a detailed overview of the tools and strategies employed by Thames Valley Police (TVP) to address Domestic Abuse (DA).

Reference was made to the data on repeated cases and that there was no data for Milton Keynes, Bracknell, Slough and Windsor and Maidenhead. The PCC said he would have a look at this and provide the information to the Panel. **[ACTION: PCC]**

RESOLVED – That the report be noted, and it was agreed that Domestic Abuse be added to the Panel’s work programme and revisited at a future meeting.

40 Report of the Panel's Road Safety Task and Finish Group

The Panel was provided with the final report of the Task and Finish Group on Road Safety.

The Chair of the Panel, Cllr Brazier introduced the report and thanked witnesses and the Panel’s Scrutiny Officer for the work carried out.

Reference was made to three areas of the review which had not been completed: pavement parking / obstruction, car cruising / meets and the enforcement of 20 mph. The Panel agreed that, where possible another meeting of the Task and Finish Group take place to consider these outstanding areas.

The PCC referred to pavement parking and pointed out that this was the responsibility of local authorities although it was acknowledged that the balance had to be got right in terms of responsibility as obstruction of pavements was a police issue.

A discussion took place on the enforcement of 20 mph speed limits / zones and Panel Members believed that these should be enforced by the police.

Discussion took place on the Road Safety Strategy and the Panel asked that the PCC defer the finalisation of the strategy until the Panel had completed its review. It was agreed that the outstanding issues be reported back to the Panel in June.

RESOLVED – (1) That approval be given to final report and the following recommendations contained in the report and that the PCC be asked to take forward the relevant recommendations to his office:

- (i) The Road Safety Strategy be shared with the Police and Crime Panel. That better coordination and communication take place on the strategy to the different local authority tiers in Thames Valley, to Highways / Road Safety Teams within local authorities and National Highways.**
- (ii) That better coordination and partnership work take place between Roads Policing and local authorities on sites chosen for Police attention.**
- (iii) That all speed data from local authorities, CSW volunteers and SIDS be fed into the Roads Policing Unit.**
- (iv) That West Berkshire Community Speedwatch Scheme should be**

considered as good practice by other local authorities to support local volunteer groups. As such ensuring all stakeholders are fully on board with community concerns around speeding.

- (v) It was agreed that there was potential for more consistent monitoring and follow-up to improve the CSW system's effectiveness and the PCC was asked to implement this with TVP.
 - (vi) That the PCC be asked to investigate linking DVLA data with CSW data and using police staff with calibrated cameras alongside the Community Speedwatch volunteers to improve the scheme.
 - (vii) That the PCC be asked to look at the use of data sharing (postcode data) between TVP and local authorities and CSW schemes.
 - (viii) That consideration be given to the creation of a forum for Community Speedwatch volunteers to enable them to give feedback, to share current good practice and to receive refresher training on the full functionality of the on-line system.
 - (ix) The PCC be asked to explore the use of funding from the Road Safety Fund for training officers to use TruCAMS and update the current equipment (3-6 devices available)
- (2) That the Task and Finish Group complete its work on the three outstanding issues and report back to the Panel.

41 PCC Road Safety Strategy update

The PCC submitted a report which provided an overview of the progress made regarding the PCC's Road Safety Strategy 2024-28.

The strategy aimed to outline PCC commitments contributing to the Safe System approach, making Thames Valley roads safer through partnership, evidence-led methods, and a focus on education and enforcement.

The report was noted.

42 October 2023 County lines intensification week update

The Panel was reminded that a request had been made at a previous meeting for additional information regarding the October 2023 County Lines Intensification Week, specifically seeking a detailed breakdown of the 98 arrests made by Thames Valley Police (TVP) during this period.

The PCC explained that in October 2023, TVP carried out extensive 4P (Prevent, Pursue, Protect, Prepare) activity during the Intensification Week. Collaborative efforts across the force led to numerous arrests and the disruption of various drug lines.

A summary of arrests and a brief overview of offenses per Local Policing Area was provided.

The Panel noted the report.

43 Police Community Support Officer (PCSO) recruitment

The PCC provided the Panel with an update on Police Community Support Officer (PCSO) recruitment as requested at a previous Panel meeting.

The PCC informed the Panel that PCSO recruitment this year had continued to be a challenge despite a significant number of applications and targeted recruitment activity. There had been an increase in the number of applications, however, there was a lower conversion rate of applications to appointable candidates.

The Panel noted that 43 PCSOs had been recruited in the last 12 months, however, there had been 51 leaving, with 15 of those becoming police officers.

Details of the recruitment activities were reported and reference was made to the possibility of offering a non-apprenticeship entry route as this had been cited as a barrier to potential candidates.

The Panel noted the report and the efforts and initiatives which were taking place to improve recruitment and retention of PCSOs.

44 Serious Organised Crime - Performance Update

The Panel received and noted a performance update on Serious Organised Crime disruptions.

45 Report of the Complaints Sub-Committee

The Panel received and noted a report on non-serious complaints made against the PCC considered by the Complaints Sub-Committee since the last meeting of the Panel.

46 Topical Issues and Updates from the PCC and the Chair

The Panel was provided with a report which provided details of policing and crime news.

47 Work Programme

The Panel's work programme was noted.

It was agreed that an update on the Force Review and the reduction of LPAs to five be added to the work programme for a future meeting.