

Thames Valley Police and Crime Panel minutes

Minutes of the meeting of the Thames Valley Police and Crime Panel held on Friday 24 March 2023 in The Paralympic Room, Buckinghamshire Council, Gatehouse Road, Aylesbury HP19 8FF, commencing at 10.30am and concluding at 1.05pm.

Members Present

Councillor Keith McLean (Milton Keynes Council – Co-Opted Member) (Chair), Councillor Balvinder Bains (Slough Borough Council), Councillor Robin Bradburn (Milton Keynes Council), Councillor Peter Brazier (Buckinghamshire Council - Co-Opted Member), Councillor David Cannon (Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead), Councillor Emily Culverhouse (Buckinghamshire Council - Co-Opted Member), Peter Gammond (Independent Co-Opted Member), Councillor Maria Gee (Wokingham Borough Council), Councillor John Harrison (Bracknell Forest Council), Councillor Richard Newcombe (Buckinghamshire Council – Substitute Member), Councillor Simon Rouse (Buckinghamshire Council - Co-Opted Member), Councillor Karen Rowland (Reading Borough Council) and Councillor Howard Woollaston (West Berkshire Council)

Officers Present

Khalid Ahmed (Scrutiny Officer)

Others Present

Matthew Barber (Thames Valley Police and Crime Commissioner) and John Campbell (Chief Constable of Thames Valley Police).

Member not in attendance

Councillor Diko Walcott (Oxford City Council)

If you have a query please contact Khalid Ahmed, Thames Valley Police & Crime Panel Scrutiny Officer (Tel: 07990 368048; Email: khalid.ahmed@buckinghamshire.gov.uk)

Agenda Item

58 Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were submitted by Councillor David Carroll (Buckinghamshire Council – Councillor Richard Newcombe substituting), Councillor Sam Casey-Rerhaye (South Oxfordshire District Council), Councillor Neil Fawcett (Vale of White Horse District Council), Councillor Eddie Reeves (Cherwell District Council), Councillor Geoff Saul (West Oxfordshire District Council) and Councillor Richard Webber (Oxfordshire County Council).

59 Minutes

The Minutes of the meeting held on 27 January 2023 were agreed as a correct record.

60 **Community Policing Strategy - Crimefighters Strategy and Community Policing**

The PCC submitted a report which outlined the Crimefighters Strategy being implemented in order to build confidence in policing and develop stronger local policing and provided a summary of the activity that has been ongoing under the Neighbourhood Policing and Citizens in Policing portfolios in Thames Valley Police. Included in this report was a forward look at how Community Policing in Thames Valley would be delivered in the future.

Reference was made to the strategy improving public contact which would involve reducing 101 waiting times, the automation of feedback and enabling better digital contact.

The PCC acknowledged the frustration that residents had with the 101 service and that the £6m cost associated with increasing call handlers was not realistic and technology would improve the service. Timescales were on track and work was taking place with technology partners. There would be improvements on feedback to victims of crimes and technology to be used would include webchat, WhatsApp and social media.

The PCC referred to the need to improve Community Policing and capitalising on the record number of police officers in Thames Valley. Further information on the Crimefighters Strategy and how it would be implemented operationally would be provided to the Panel.

On neighbourhood policing, the PCC referred to the Royal Borough of Windsor Council who had invested in four additional police officers to support community safety. Neighbourhood Policing emphasised a local approach to policing that was accessible to the public and responsive to the needs and priorities of communities.

The visibility of police officers was important in terms of building public confidence and encouraging the compliance with the law.

Members' Questions

- (1) Reference was made the PCC's Crime and Justice Plan where a strategic objective was to work together with partners to improve criminal justice. The PCC was asked how was the proposal for the Police to focus on policing rather than dealing with mental health issues going to be implemented?

[The PCC replied that Thames Valley Police covered many areas and that partnerships with mental health partners were complex. There were four Integrated Care Systems which covered the Thames Valley and there were complexities with mental health trusts in Thames Valley. Reference was made to the recent directive from the Department of Health, "Right Care, Right Person", which was a model designed to ensure that when there were concerns for a person's welfare linked to mental health, medical or social care issues, the right person with the right skills,

training and experience would respond. This would enable police officers to deal with policing matters.

In Humberside, conversations had taken place with health bodies who were being encouraged to respond to incidents where mental health was a factor. There were challenges around mental health and more was needed to be done to provide the right care for people.

The PCC referred to children in care who went missing and calls being made to the 101 service for police assistance. The PCC believed, as Corporate Parents, local authorities should be dealing with this. Work needed to take place with partners on this.]

- (2) Reference was made to on-line reporting, which was a good initiative, however, not everyone had access to technology so using the 101 service was their only option. The PCC was asked whether call handlers dealt with calls from a script of prepared questions as there needed to be empathy showed to callers.

[The PCC agreed that not everyone wanted to use technology and acknowledged that there were areas of Thames Valley which were multi-cultural and callers needed assurance and sympathy from call handlers. In the use of WhatsApp there was a translation tool which would be useful as it was recognised that there was crime which went unreported from certain areas of Thames Valley and this initiative would make the police more accessible.

In response to a comment on dropped calls, the PCC reported there were plans to rectify this. Also, residents who had dropped calls and re-dialled lost their place in the queue. This needed to be looked at with the possibility of call backs and referrals.]

- (3) The PCC was asked about data which showed that Police Community Support Officers (PCSO) were down by 37% and there were an increasing number who had left to become police officers. Were there any plans to rectify this by giving PCSOs more powers and responsibilities?

[The PCC replied that PCSO numbers were down and there were many that did leave to become police officers. Recruitment of PCSOs was taking place and it was hoped that in the next 3//4 years PCSOs would be back to full establishment.

The PCC informed the Panel that PCSOs were the bedrock of neighbourhood policing and that they needed more powers. However, the more powers they were given, the less they were PCSOs, so it was important that the right balance was found. Increased responsibility and powers would mean more paperwork and less time spent out in communities. There could be an option of introducing supervisory roles within the role of PCSOs.

The Chief Constable commented that PCSOs were vital to Thames Valley and referred

to mainly younger PCSOs who left the service to become police officers. This required looking at to ensure retention.

- (4) Reference was made to Thames Valley having a low pro rata number of police officers to residents compared to other force areas which was misleading in terms of recent police numbers increasing as the population in Thames Valley had increased.

[The PCC acknowledged the point made, however, in the last 20 years, policing had changed. Frontline police officers now also dealt with cyber crimes and scams. Some Forces had increased their numbers of police officers and put them into civilian posts.

In relation to police officers and the population of the Thames Valley, there were around 10 police officers to every 100,000 residents. There would be a continuing increase in numbers of police officers and making sure they were in appropriate locations.]

- (5) The PCC was asked about the engagement with communities at Parish level which had fallen away since the Pandemic. There used to be informal forums with TVP and Parishes, in which time the number of PCSOs had been reduced.

[The PCC replied that he would have a look into this. There would be a standardisation of increasing community engagement. There were teams good at this and some that were not. There was the need to get back to good neighbourhood teams who would provide crime data for local areas.]

- (6) The PCC was asked whether he was working with other PCCs and the Home Office on looking to address the falling number of PCSOs across the UK (38% down in the last 8 years). Reference was made to the work which local authorities undertook in relation to care workers which included incentivised retention packages.

[The PCC replied that the Home Office was not to blame for the decreasing numbers of PCSOs. The main issue has been the recruitment of more police officers which has had an impact on the number of PCSOs. The retention of PCSOs was a national issue, although some forces have taken the decision to reduce numbers. In Thames Valley there was a commitment to increase the numbers and get back to full establishment.]

- (7) The PCC was asked how would he deal with the challenge of getting low levels crimes reported, particularly against the backdrop of low conviction rates for such crimes?

[The PCC acknowledged that there was a problem around conviction rates, however, it was difficult to compare conviction rates of different crimes. The reality was that historically, the communication of convictions for low level crimes was not

communicated. With the increased use of social media and technology there was more communicated to the public.

Low level crimes were heard at magistrates' courts which often did not get reported. An example was given of criminal damage to vehicles, where the compiling of evidence was difficult if there was damage to several vehicles by one perpetrator and it was difficult to identify all the victims of such incidents.]

RESOLVED -That the reports of the PCC, together with the information provided be noted.

61 Cyber and Digital Investigation & Intelligence

The PCC submitted a report which provided details on cyber and digital investigation and intelligence.

The PCC explained that there was a significant overlap in this area for TVP and regionally. Reference was made to a service plan which had been created to define and focus the priorities and strategies for Thames Valley Police and the Regional Cyber Crime Units (CCU). The plan sought to align service delivery based on the key strands of the Government's National Cyber Strategy 2022 and TVP force priorities as detailed within the Thames Valley Police Strategic Plan 2019/2020.

Members' Questions

- (1) Reference was made to a digital intelligence investigation team and the PCC was asked how was he and the Chief Constable ensuring these specialists were retained within the force and not recruited by other forces or the private sector?

[The PCC replied that this was the same for other areas of the force and it was important that risks of losing staff was mitigated against. It was relatively easier to manage through the discrete regional unit as there were opportunities for career progression.

The PCC also referred to the need to look at other specialists in cybercrime who could help the force. Using volunteers and special constables whose expertise TVP could harness to benefit policing and the Thames Valley.]

- (2) The PCC was asked whether the cyber work which was being carried out by TVP was promoted to residents to offer reassurance and confidence in the work which is being done to prevent cybercrime. Also, what was the PCC doing to advise organisations and educate the community on the cybercrime risks?

[The PCC replied that it was important to get the message out there that policing was not just about police visibility as people were more likely to be victims of cybercrime than for example, robbery. Crimes such as romance scams could be very

damaging for the victim; financially and psychologically.

It was important that messages were put out there, including the risks involved and how important it was for people to choose and change passwords which would make it more difficult for scammers.

The Cyber Resilient Centre for the southeast was engaging with businesses and going into businesses, particularly smaller businesses, to test resilience to cyber-attacks.]

- (3) A Member referred to the national alarm which would be sounding on mobile phones on 23 April, 2023 and the risks this posed for domestic abuse victims. The PCC was asked what was TVP doing to allay the fears of people who will not be able to turn off their mobile phones?

[The PCC said that this was an important point and that Victims First would be offering advice, however, it was inevitable that not everyone could be contacted.]

- (4) The PCC was asked what activities were the Dark Web Team looking at?

[The PCC replied there would be a separate team that would do the undercover on-line element, but there was an overlap between this team and the Dark Web Team. Child abuse investigations were carried out discretely, and officers who carried out these duties required psychological support which was put in place. The cyber team were looking at the drugs market and economic crime but would have links with the other teams.]

RESOLVED – That the report of the PCC and the information provided at the meeting be noted.

62 RESTART Thames Valley

The Panel was provided with a report on the work of RESTART Thames Valley, a year-long pilot programme that started in May 2022 and which focused on supporting people leaving prison, including women and those on short-term sentences.

The Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner secured £613,800 from the second round of the Ministry of Justice Local Leadership and Integration Fund (Prison Leavers Project) to work with partners across the region to develop solutions to key challenges faced by people released from prison. The PCC referred to such challenges which included the provision of and access to support, access to accommodation and work opportunities and engagement with numerous service providers.

This pilot ran from May 2022 to end of April 2023, and this has been extended for a further 12 months, jointly funded by the PCC and the Director of Probation, South Central.

The PCC reported that the objective of the scheme was about crime prevention and stopping the cyclical pattern of people who went to prison.

Members' Questions

- (1) The PCC was asked what work was being carried out with female re-offenders?

[The PCC replied that in the first project with Bullingdon and Bronzefield Prisons, there was an initial cohort of female prisoners, there were some nuances on the support they needed, but they needed drug abuse support etc. There were contributory factors such as some previous trauma with females around domestic abuse or sexual assault with them as victims. Close work has taken place with Alana House in Reading who primarily provided support for women in that area.]

- (2) The PCC was asked why there was no operational police representation on the Executive Board. In addition, there were other pilots taking place where one of the other issues for prison leavers was the universal credit process. DWP work coaches and support officers were being placed in prisons to help with this element. Was this part of RESTART or was this a gap in the provision of the service?

[The PCC referred to the work being carried out which had found for example, that 33% of prison release took place on a Friday afternoon, which caused a particular problem for leavers and for organisations.]

The membership of the Executive Board consisted of those organisations and partners who were actively involved with the project when it was MOJ funded. Below the Board level, there were interactions with the Police, DWP and around the Integrated Offender Management. The Board was purely for governance and finance.]

- (3) Reference was made to prolific offenders who after rehabilitation, were then brought back into the criminal justice system, which was counterproductive for the individual who had been on the road to recovery. The PCC was asked for his view on this.

[The PCC said this would depend on the offences but that victims should see justice done. There was of course, an issue of what went on inside prisons, which was not within his remit.]

There were challenges around the prison system and police involvement in investigating crimes inside.]

RESOLVED – That the report and the information provided by the PCC be noted.

63 Multi Agency Safeguarding Hubs - Role of TVP

The PCC submitted a report which provided an overview of the initial implementation of Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hubs (MASH), the current landscape, emerging risks and opportunities for the future and TVP's involvement in them.

The PCC referred to some of the benefits of robotic automation in relation to safeguarding and that Robotic Process Automation (RPA) was used to relieve demand on 101 (around 600 calls per month) and improve service delivery to partners by eliminating call waiting time. This worked very well as it sped things up and spotted things quicker, which was vital for domestic violence disclosures (Clare's Law): RPA identified current or expired high-risk DA perpetrators in new or previously unknown intimate relationships to prompt a 'Right to know' disclosure to their partner.

Members' Questions

- (1) There was concern expressed at the fragility of the MASH system in the Thames Valley, particularly with local authority's changing their financial commitments, and the PCC was asked who was responsible to ensure the provision of the service was maintained?

[The PCC replied that he had the opportunity to bring partners together and on a political level, to make sure there were the right strategic partnerships. It was important that partners held each other to account, and he would be discussing MASHs with Chief Executives and Leaders of Councils. There were statutory duties for partners which had to be met. It was important that the correct rank of officer of the organisation was at meetings to ensure that key strategic decisions could be taken.]

The Chief Constable expressed his concern at the situation and referred to the importance of partners working together and sharing information. There were differences across Thames Valley of how MASHs operated, with six MASHs in Berkshire and this was a challenge. It was important that MASHs continued because of the important work they carried out in terms of safeguarding children and adults.]

- (2) A Member referred to the national review which took place into the murders of Arthur Labinjo-Hughes and Star Hobson which recommended that child protection practices are delivered at a local level and are multi-agency end-to-end in dedicated multi-agency child protection units in every LA area. The PCC was asked what were the implications for TVP and the local authorities that Thames Valley was at risk of not fulfilling the national recommendations or meeting partner expectations?

[The PCC replied that this was still an emerging picture, and it would be a challenge, however, he would expect TVP to meet the commitment to ensure there was maximum safeguarding but that discussions were required to address the issues. However, TVP were reliant on other partners to ensure recommendations were complied with. There was a need to know the timescales for meeting those

recommendations and look at mitigations. Those recommendations would be monitored by the Deputy Chief Constable.]

- (3) The PCC was asked what arrangements and plans were in place in relation to child refugees who were placed in the Thames Valley area?

[The PCC replied that there was a challenge on where refugees were put but communication was important with the accommodation providers and the Home Office. There were robust processes in place to safeguarding of people that were known.]

- (4) When setting up MASHs, there was an emphasis on physical space for collaboration. However, since the pandemic there have been much more digital and virtual collaboration. Was there still a requirement for physical meeting for collaboration and information sharing?

[The PCC replied that there was probably a middle ground, however, physically meeting, engendered good relationships. Standardisation was important around safeguarding to ensure that everyone was protected to the same standard.

The Chief Constable replied that he agreed that there were many benefits of remote working but it was good practise to ensure that there was good team working.]

- (5) Reference was made to Operation Compass and the comment in the report that the current Information Sharing Agreements completed with 94% of schools force-wide only approve the date, time and location of the incident and not the parties involved, risk grading or circumstance. The PCC was asked to expand on this.

[The PCC said he would come back with more information on this.]

RESOLVED – That the report of the PCC and the information reported be noted.

64 Chairman/PCC Updates/Topical Issues

- **Failure of the Panel to hold two Confirmation Hearings for the PCC's Chief of Staff and Chief Finance Officer**

The Chair of the Panel read out the following statement from the Monitoring Officer to the Panel:-

“By way of reminder in Minutes of the Meeting of 27 January 2023, under the matter of Confirmation Hearings - A Member of the Panel raised the issue of the failure of the Panel to hold Confirmation Hearings for the PCC appointed Chief of Staff and Chief Finance Officer and the advice he had received from the Home Office. The PCC replied that he had given the PCP the required three weeks' notice for each appointment as required under legislation, however, due to the failure of the PCP to appoint a Chair at its annual meeting, the PCP was unable to confirm the

appointments.

A Confirmation Hearing for the Chief of Staff was set up immediately after last June's adjourned Annual meeting on 24th June 2022. The Panel was asked to appoint a Chair just for this meeting, but the minutes record that the Panel declined this at the adjourned annual meeting.

An email from Anita Bradley, Monitoring Officer on 8 July 2022 to reconvene the Panel meeting dated 29 July 2022, stressed the importance of reconvening the annual meeting, to enable a Chair to be appointed as the Panel had statutory responsibilities (Confirmation Hearings, Annual Reports).

The legal position of both the PCC and the Panel's responsibilities is set out in the Police Reform and Social Responsibility Act 2011. Paragraph 10, Schedule 1 of the Act, says that once a PCC has notified the relevant PCP of the proposed senior appointment, the Panel must hold a confirmation hearing in public with the proposed candidate, and subsequently produce and publish a report and recommendation for the PCC on whether the Panel supports the proposed senior appointment. The Panel must comply with these scrutiny procedures within 3 weeks of receiving notification from the PCC of the proposed appointment.

Paragraph 12 of the legislation sets out the responsibilities of the PCC once the Panel have responded, so that the PCC does have the option to make appointments if the PCP do not agree with the proposed appointments. And the PCC is also required to notify the Panel if they disagree or agree with the PCP's recommendations.

The three-week statutory timeline for responding to the PCC expired on the day of the 24 June meeting.

As the PCC has appointed a Chief of Staff and the Chief Finance Officer to ensure PCC business could be conducted, then I am advised by the Monitoring Officer that there are no further options available to the Panel or further legal responsibilities of the Panel.

There are lessons that can be learned from by both the Panel and the PCC regarding appointments and confirmation hearings and a working relationship between ourselves on these matters.

So based on the advice of the Monitoring Officer, and this learning, my recommendation is that a line is now drawn under this matter. In the meantime, I will be recommending to the Home Office that the legislation does need to be reviewed and amended and we are happy to act as a consultee."

- **Casey Report into the Metropolitan Police**

The PCC was asked how Thames Valley would respond to the Casey Report into the

Metropolitan Police (The Met).

The PCC reported that this was a very disturbing report for the Metropolitan Police. There were things in this report which other PCCs would use to scrutinise their Chief Constables. TVP would be looking at areas of challenge in the report.

TVP had a very different culture to the Met and has a number of safeguards in place and proactively worked in response to allegations against officers. There were questions raised regarding the future and size of the Metropolitan Police and the possible influences on the neighbouring force areas.

The Met had significant national responsibilities and there was an argument that it should be slimmed down to make it more manageable to control. An Option could be stripping some of the Met's responsibilities, some of which were commercial roles and there were PCC companies that could take over these roles. There were roles that could be taken over by the National Crime Agency who were accountable to the Home Office, whereas Police Forces were accountable to Mayors and PCCs.

In relation to TVP, policing at Windsor Castle was managed by the Met Police which was an anomaly in relation to operational policing in Thames Valley.

Reference was made to officers who had remained in post when they had been accused of domestic abuse and violence and women and girls. The PCC was asked if he would advocate suspending officers who have had such allegations made against them or would prefer them to be moved into an area of policing where they would not come into contact with the public, or even with other officers if appropriate.

The PCC pointed out that the disciplinary response was the responsibility of the Chief Constable, but his personal opinion was that he would be against moving officers away as the perception was that you were just moving the problem away. If there was a risk, the officer should be suspended. TVP has a good record around suspending officers where allegations of significant concern have been made

- **Proposal of Reducing Local Policing Areas (LPA) in Thames Valley**

The PCC was asked about the proposal to reduce LPAs from 11 to 5.

Reference was also made to what impact would a reduction of LPAs have on Community Safety Partnership (CSP), in terms of local neighbourhood policing.

In response, the PCC reported that the last time this was changed was around 10 years ago, and he believed it was the right time to review this. There was no comparison in size between TVP and the Met so any proposed changes would not greatly impact on residents. Community Safety was a local authority responsibility and that would be maintained as it was a building block.

The PCC reminded the Panel that the Force Review was an operational area which the Chief Constable was responsible for and which he would then scrutinise the implementation. There was a Panel work programme item for a future meeting which would provide more information.

Local authorities had raised different views during the Force Review consultation, ranging from impact on the Community Safety Partnerships and local policing on the ground.

CSPs were recognised as important by TVP. Reference was made to currently all crime figures being aggregated (e.g Bracknell and Wokingham); these should be able to be separated.

Neighbouring policing would be planned around CSPs but with a wider command.

- **Firearms**

A Member referred to some of the officers being investigated within the Metropolitan Police that had emanated from firearms backgrounds. The PCC was asked whether TVP had undertaken an analysis of their tactical units and undertaken background checks.

The PCC replied that there was a difference between TVP and the Met, as firearms support in TVP and Hampshire was very much around supporting local policing. The Chief Constable commented on the positive culture within TVP and the specialist units.

- **CCTV Partnership in Thames Valley**

A Member referred to concerns regarding using CCTV for the general monitoring and surveillance of the public, rather than for its original purpose for public safety and traffic monitoring. The PCC was asked, how were these concerns to be addressed in the CCTV partnership in Thames Valley.

The PCC replied that there was no intention of surveillance of the public. CCTV would be used for public safety and the partnership's objective for example in Oxfordshire, was to join up CCTV, controlled in one control room. The local authority would have the final say on what CCTV they wanted to hand over to TVP.

The Panel noted the topical issues report and the information provided by the PCC.

65 Work Programme

The Chair asked that an update on RESTART be added to the work programme for March 2024.

The PCC asked that a future meeting of the Panel be convened at a TVP

establishment such as the Training college. Also, reference was made to a possible Panel site visit to the Contact Management Centres. It was agreed that the Panel at its annual meeting on 23 June 2023 make a decision on this.

Race and BAME representation in TVP work programme item be combined with Race Action Plan work programme item for 13 November 2023.

Violence against Women and Girls, partnership working, education programme could be added as a future work programme item. It was agreed that this would be added to 13 November 2023 meeting.

The Work Programme was noted.