

**POLICE AND CRIME PANEL
30th January, 2015**

Present:-

Barnsley Metropolitan Borough Council:-

Councillor M. Dyson

Doncaster Metropolitan Borough Council:-

Councillor J. Sheppard

Rotherham Metropolitan Borough Council:-

Councillor M. Parker

Councillor A. Sangster

Sheffield City Council:-

Councillor T. Hussain

Councillor R. Munn

Apologies for absence were received from:-

Councillor R. Davison, Sheffield City Council

Councillor H. Harpham, Sheffield City Council

Mayor R. Jones, Doncaster Metropolitan Borough Council

Councillor R. Sixsmith, M.B.E., Barnsley Metropolitan Borough Council

Mr. A. Carter, Co-opted Member

Also in attendance:- South Yorkshire Police and Crime Commissioner Dr. A. Billings; with officials of the Commissioner's Office : Mrs. M. Buttery (Chief Executive) and Mr. A. Rainford (Chief Finance Officer).

J27. APPOINTMENT OF VICE-CHAIRMAN

Resolved:- That Councillor Alex Sangster (Rotherham MBC) be appointed Vice-Chairman of the South Yorkshire Police and Crime Panel for the remainder of the 2014/15 Municipal Year.

(In the absence of the Chairman, Councillor Sangster assumed the Chair)

J28. RESIGNATION OF INDEPENDENT CO-OPTEE

Members were informed of the resignation, with immediate effect, of Mr. Kash Walayat, an Independent Co-optee on the South Yorkshire Police and Crime Panel.

J29. QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC

A member of the public asked the following question and confirmed that he had previously asked a very similar question at the meeting of this Panel held on 17th June, 2013:-

“Please confirm where Road Safety appears in these revised Policing priorities (and in the Police and Crime Plan), particularly Enforcement of 20mph speed limits in residential areas, which are being installed by local authorities, eg. Sheffield City Council, in response to public demand.

Her Majesty’s Inspectorate of Constabulary (HMIC) revised its national guidelines to include exceeding a 20mph speed limit as an endorsable offence. But there's a perception that little is being done to enforce this locally, and that drivers can ignore this with impunity”.

In reply, the South Yorkshire Police and Crime Commissioner stated that the Police and Crime Plan deals with high level priorities. The South Yorkshire Police is required to take road safety very seriously and does fulfil that requirement. There are 20 mph speed limits now appearing in many side streets in the Sheffield area. The Commissioner also stated that the final version of the refreshed Police and Crime Plan has not yet been published and the Commissioner’s Office will look again at the inclusion of road safety issues within the Plan. Additionally, the Commissioner undertook to speak with the Chief Constable of the South Yorkshire Police about the practical policing approach to 20 mph speed limits. On 19th January 2015, the Commissioner had met with a group representing the interests of cyclists and they too had referred to the issue of 20 mph speed limits.

As a supplementary question, the member of the public asked about the way in which the public could be kept informed of progress with this matter.

The South Yorkshire Police and Crime Commissioner replied that members of the public may contact his office and ask questions about Police issues. Another means would be to raise issues via the Neighbourhood Watch organisation, which holds meetings from time to time around the County.

J30. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING HELD ON 19TH NOVEMBER, 2014

Consideration was given to the minutes of the previous meeting of the South Yorkshire Police and Crime Panel held on 19th November, 2014.

Reference was made to the use of the phrase “*to forget the past*” within the text of Minute No. 24 (Introduction of the newly-elected Police and Crime Commissioner) of the previous meeting and it was agreed that

these words be deleted from the minutes.

Resolved:- That the minutes of the previous meeting held on 19th November, 2014 be approved as a correct record, for signature by the Chairman, with the inclusion of a clerical correction by the deletion of the phrase shown above.

J31. PRECEPT PROPOSAL FOR 2015/16

Consideration was given to a report, submitted by the Chief Finance Officer to the Office of the South Yorkshire Police and Crime Commissioner, containing information about the South Yorkshire Police and Crime Commissioner's proposed Council Tax precept for the 2015/16 financial year.

Attached to the report was a draft of the Police and Crime Plan setting out the strategic direction for policing in South Yorkshire and providing the information necessary for the determination of the revenue budget and Council Tax precept.

In presenting the report and the proposed Police budget for 2015/16, the Police and Crime Commissioner made historical references to 'interesting times' and 'challenging times', as well as to the current harsh financial climate for public authorities. The submitted report referred to the building blocks of the financial plan which lies behind the Police and Crime Plan. The funding for the Police Service has been reduced year-on-year by the coalition Government, during its tenure, placing a squeeze on local authority and Police funding. The Police Grant has also been reduced. The coalition Government has held money back at the centre of Government (often referred to as 'top slicing') for national priorities and schemes/projects.

Therefore, uncertainty has been created in the process of budget-making for Police services and an assumption has had to be made of approximately 3% budget cuts for the 2015/16 financial year. The provisional funding settlement was received just a few days before Christmas 2014, when the coalition Government announced a reduction of 5.1% in the spending available for public authority budgets. Consequently, there has been only a short time in which to respond and the task has been to find an additional reduction of £3 millions to the proposed budget for 2015/16. The total Police budget is approximately £240 millions per year. It is anticipated that a similar bleak position will continue after the General Election of 7th May, 2015.

There may be a need to draw on the financial reserves within the Police budget. The combined effect of the funding reduction and pressures mean that almost £17.5 millions will need to be found to balance the 2015/16 budget, ie: the original amount, plus the additional sum as a consequence of the coalition Government's announcement before Christmas 2014. The budget pressures (eg: wages and price increases) will have to be paid for

and the funding gap has to be bridged by making cuts, achieving savings or by generating additional income. Another option is to accept the coalition Government's offer of the Council Tax freeze grant, which would net an extra £547,000 of Government funding. There is also the alternative option of increasing the precept amount; such increase has to be below 2% otherwise a referendum would be triggered.

The argument for increasing the amount of the precept, instead of accepting the offer of the Council Tax freeze grant, is that this specific grant funding is for one single financial year and is not guaranteed in future years. The acceptance of the freeze grant brings uncertainty with it. Therefore, the preference is to raise the level of Council Tax level in order to raise the overall financial base of the Police budget. Hence the proposed 1.95% increase in precept and the avoidance of a referendum.

The submitted report refers to the task of finding £9.644 millions of savings (ie: the amount of reduction in funding made by the coalition Government). The South Yorkshire Police Force has reviewed its activities and the majority of these proposals have been identified by the Force's review programme "Diamond" which was established in 2010 with the aim of transforming policing by using resources more effectively. Other savings proposals were itemised in the submitted report.

The possibility of drawing upon the financial reserves within the Police budget is inadvisable because the reserves are not as substantial as the Service might wish. Some reserves are 'free for use', in that they have not been earmarked for any particular scheme; yet, other financial reserves have already been earmarked specifically for future capital schemes. The amount of 'free' reserves is approximately 2% of the total Police revenue budget and, as such, this amount is not at a prudential level.

Ideally, the Police Service must not take any more amounts from its reserves and ought to be trying to increase them. Amounts of money must be held in reserve for any contingency and because of the identified need for future spending on, for example, the outcome of the current Hillsborough Inquest. It is not yet known whether the total cost of this Inquest will have to be met from the South Yorkshire Police Service budget. Perhaps there may eventually be some subsidy provided by the coalition Government.

The submitted report detailed the full effect of the proposed budget savings. Some 85% of the Police budget is the cost of employees (personnel) and it is inevitable that the budget cuts will impact upon the number of people employed in the Police Service. The cost of employee overtime is a considerable factor. In every year since 2010, including the current 2014/15 financial year, there have been reductions in all levels of Police personnel, with the sole exception that the numbers of Police Community Support Officers (PCSOs) have remained constant and unreduced.

The question is whether the Police Force is able to retain people, especially to maintain the neighbourhood Policing policy (known to be a high priority for the general public of South Yorkshire) at the levels the public would like, given the reduction in funding. The solution is that the Police Service will achieve that objective only by making changes to the model of policing currently being used.

Together, the Police and Crime Commissioner and the Chief Constable have written to all four of the South Yorkshire principal local authorities, sending documents which detail the proposals for "Securing the Future of Neighbourhood Policing". In brief, the proposals are to restructure the teams of uniformed Police Officers and to make better use of ICT technology in terms of Service delivery. Copies of these documents were distributed at the meeting to each one of the Police and Crime Panel Members present.

The proposals are intended to :-

- ensure that uniformed officers continue to respond to emergency '999' calls;
- have neighbourhood teams and the teams of uniformed officers combined under the same management and, for example, will receive the same briefings;
- align the shift patterns of the two sets of teams;
- increase the overall skills of both teams
- introduce the use of new ICT technology, so that reports may be prepared by Officers, using laptops in Police vehicles, which will ensure that Officers spend more time in the neighbourhoods instead of returning to Police stations in order to file their reports;
- ensure that the training of all Police personnel will be 'neighbourhood focused'.

There are no budget proposals to effect any change to the use of PCSOs, who are known and appreciated by the general public in the communities they serve. There is an existing trial of the new methods of working, taking place at Woodseats (Sheffield); there is good progress being made with the trial and the new methods of working are popular amongst younger officers. These changes will take time to become embedded in Police Service practice and, overall, should produce more visible policing.

In financial terms, the revised working arrangements will also produce the necessary amount of budget savings and ensure the retention of the neighbourhood policing system. In conclusion, the proposals detailed in the submitted report will enable the Police to achieve a balanced budget for the 2015/16 financial year.

After the Police and Crime Commissioner had completed his presentation of the budget report, the Members of the Police and Crime Panel asked the following questions:-

(1) (Councillor Parker) Does this Panel need to be provided with more information, to be able to approve the Commissioner's budget proposals ?

Response - The Police and Crime Commissioner expressed the view that sufficient financial information about the budget proposals had already been provided for the Panel Members. The full narrative of the Police and Crime Plan would be available soon.

(2) (Councillor Parker) The general public, especially Rotherham residents, are having to endure a variety of tax and rent increases which, all added together, produce a substantial total sum. Are the Police budget savings firm and guaranteed savings, or will the Commissioner seek further savings or precept increases in the future ? The Police sometimes has to spend a lot of money in employees' overtime; there is also the predicament of 'unforeseen circumstances', including the child sexual exploitation in Rotherham. It is very difficult to plan for the necessary savings.

In terms of the requirement to make sufficient savings in respect of price inflation - the European Union states have experienced some deflation and this factor may soon apply to the United Kingdom; therefore, the Police should carefully negotiate its procurement of goods, equipment and services so that costs can be reduced. The Police should look again at price inflation, in order that more savings can be achieved in that part of the budget.

Response - The Police and Crime Commissioner acknowledged that it was not possible to predict every eventually and therefore overtime costs are a specific budget pressure. Officials at the Commissioner's Office have advised that the budget proposals are based upon sound financial judgement. If there is any significant and unexpected budget pressure (eg: a number of public protest marches which require extensive policing), the Police Service is unable to levy an additional precept, but must instead make use of the 'free', unallocated financial reserves.

In terms of inflationary and deflationary effects, there was originally an incorrect assumption made about rising fuel costs and the subsequent correction adjusted those costs downwards. There was more uncertainty about wages' costs. The process of budget estimating, by its very nature, is always likely to contain some error.

The South Yorkshire Police participate in the joint purchasing of goods and equipment etc, together with other Police Forces, so as to enjoy better leverage in the negotiation of prices using single contracts with bulk purchases.

The Commissioner did not demur with Councillor Parker's view about the general public having to cope with an accumulation of different tax and rent increases. The general perception is that the public is prepared to pay the increased cost for improved policing, because people value the existence of good law and order in society.

(3) (Councillor Sheppard) With reference to the Police budget's reserves being maintained at a 'prudent, yet minimum amount', are there any statutory guidelines relating to a 'minimum amount' ?

Response - The Police and Crime Commissioner stated that there is no statutory guidance available. The Police Force is aware of the 'unknown costs' which will arise from the issues such as : child sexual exploitation, the miners' strike and the hearing about the incident at Orgreave, the Hillsborough Inquest. It may be the case that substantial sums of money will have to be spent, although some costs may ultimately be recouped from central Government (Home Department). The Commissioner is soon to meet the Home Secretary and discuss this very issue.

(4) (Councillor Sheppard) Organisations sometimes alternate between different work patterns and structures. There is an ethos of multi-tasking and generalisation, which is thought to be more efficient and perhaps a cheaper option. Yet, the organisational cycle later returns to a specialised approach. Is there a danger that the Police will just be re-active (to reported crime) rather than taking a pro-active approach to preventing and solving crimes ? Will this approach result in increased expenditure ?

Response - The Police and Crime Commissioner advised Panel Members to read the submitted documents about "Securing the Future of Neighbourhood Policing". The Police will still be specialists and provide specialised 'hubs' of Officers available to all policing teams in the neighbourhoods. As part of the trial of the new method of working, the Police force will be making a calculation of the time spent in the community, compared to the time previously required to return to Police stations for the completion of paper-work. There is an initial estimation that the new method will provide an additional 150,000 hours (equivalent to 74 officers), per year, of Police presence in the neighbourhoods, when compared to existing methods of working.

(5) (Councillor Hussain) The Panel ought to support the increased precept, because the Council tax freeze grant (offering just £547,000) will not be a sufficient amount to support the budget. Does the Commissioner have more details about the budget pressures?

Also – if 85% of the Police budget is spent on personnel and there is the necessity to make some £12 millions in savings, what will be the percentage reduction in Police personnel this year?

Response – On behalf of the Police and Crime Commissioner, the Chief Finance Officer stated that the 2015/16 budget estimates include provision for an increase of 1% in wages' costs. The total savings to be made on employee costs by the Police Force are £2.1 millions. Another £2.4 millions of savings are also required, meaning that employee savings amount to £5.5 millions of the total of £7.7 millions of specific budget pressures.

The Chief Finance Officer also stated that, although inflation is reducing, the Police Force has still to contend with increases in some prices for goods and services, because of the obligations of existing, long term purchasing contracts. The Force must also fund its share of costs for certain national policing arrangements which affect the County of South Yorkshire. The specific number of reduced personnel, likely to be the consequence of the budget reductions, is not available to report at today's meeting, but the figure can be provided separately to Panel Members.

(6) (Councillor Parker) Doesn't the Police Service want to receive the Council tax freeze grant ? Is it the intention simply to avoid a referendum by increasing the precept by 1.95%, just 0.05% below the threshold for a referendum ? This decision has been taken deliberately in order to avoid the referendum and prevent the public from expressing their opinion about the Police budget. Generally, people get impression that local authorities and Police authorities are doing that all the time.

In reply, the Police Commissioner asked whether Councillor Parker was recommending that a referendum be held about the proposed increase in the Police precept for 2015/16.

Councillor Parker replied that the impression people will get is that these budget proposals are being made deliberately so as to avoid the referendum.

The Police and Crime Commissioner stated that the general public is not being prevented from "having a say". However, it is preferable that the Police budget proposals should ensure that the expense of a referendum is avoided. The cost of a referendum will inevitably be significant and should be contemplated only if a very considerable sum of money is needed for budget purposes.

Councillor Parker suggested that the people of South Yorkshire be given the chance to express a view on the Police and Crime Commissioner's 2015/16 budget proposals.

The Police and Crime Commissioner retorted that there are several different ways of gauging public opinion. The Commissioner is confident that there will be public support for the 2015/16 budget proposals.

The Chief Executive of the Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner stated that the required, statutory business consultation process about the budget proposals, 2015/16, has already taken place. The Commissioner's Office has also undertaken a public survey about the budget proposals and, whilst responses are still being received, the comments so far show that people are broadly in favour of the proposals.

Councillor Parker repeated his assertion that the budget information provided is incomplete and that the additional papers should be made available in advance of the Panel meeting, not during it.

The Police and Crime Commissioner stated that the information about "Securing the Future of Neighbourhood Policing" had been sent to the local authority Chief Executives two weeks ago and Councillors ought to have received it by now. The budget-setting timetable is determined by the coalition Government and Parliament and not by local authorities nor the Police and Crime Commissioners. The coalition Government had announced the provisional funding settlement during December 2014 and the final settlement is expected to be announced during February 2015. Public authorities are left in a difficult position when setting their budgets.

Councillor Parker stated his view that, consequently, the Police and Crime Panel is left with fewer facts on which to base its decision about the budget.

The Police and Crime Commissioner stated that local authorities must do their best with the information available.

(7) (Councillor Sangster) The public must be able to have confidence in the Elected decision makers.

Response - The Police and Crime Commissioner further stated that the budget contains £2.5 millions earmarked for services for vulnerable adults. There is a pressure on the Police resources which accommodate the public protection units, of which there are some, but not all in respect of the child sexual exploitation issue.

(8) (Councillor Sangster) The former methods of targeted and tactical policing are now being changed and the emphasis is being placed upon neighbourhood policing.

Is there a contradiction with those two types of policing : is one general and the other specific ?

Response - The Police and Crime Commissioner replied that the Police must allocate sufficient resources to investigate crimes such as murder, burglary, car theft etc. The future intention is to have multi-disciplinary teams which will be capable of providing a much more flexible service. All Police officers will have responsibilities within the communities they serve. They will be visible within communities even when they are not investigation a specific crime incident. The use of the new ICT technology, especially, will facilitate that new system.

The Chief Executive of the Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner confirmed the intention of the South Yorkshire Police to respond to organisational change. All policing is intelligence-led and there is the priority of making communities feel safe. The neighbourhood teams will be involved both in solving crimes and also making communities feel safe. The Police must assess the threat, the harm and the risk and deploy resources appropriately.

The Police and Crime Commissioner reported that although, in general terms, levels of crime are known to be reducing, there are still some specific crimes whose incidence is increasing. Police officers will spend a percentage of their time on crime investigation. A great deal of time will also be spent on work in neighbourhoods and in dealing with nuisance issues and anti-social behaviour.

Councillor Sangster offered the opinion that the acceptance of the Council tax freeze grant, from the coalition Government may perhaps serve only to corrode the budget base for the Police Service.

After questions and answers had ended, the Police and Crime Panel members voted on the contents of the submitted report about the South Yorkshire Police precept for the 2015/16 financial year.

Resolved:- (1) That the report be received and its contents noted.

(2) That the contents of the documents detailing the Police and Crime Commissioner's proposals for "Securing the Future of Neighbourhood Policing" (distributed to Panel Members at this meeting) be noted.

(3) That the South Yorkshire Police and Crime Panel supports the proposal, now submitted by the South Yorkshire Police and Crime Commissioner, to increase the Council Tax by 1.95% for 2015/16, which is equivalent to an annual increase for a Band D property of £2.83 (6p per week).

J32. REPORT OF THE LEGAL ADVISER - UPDATE ON THE OPERATION OF THE COMPLAINTS PROCEDURE

Consideration was given to a report of the Legal Adviser/Monitoring Officer, which provided an update on the handling of complaints received against the Police and Crime Commissioner, specifically both the former Commissioner and his Deputy.

It was clarified that there were no complaints about the current Commissioner and that all of the issues within the report referred either to the former Commissioner or to the former Deputy Commissioner.

In accordance with Regulation 6(1) of the Elected Local Policing Bodies (Complaints and Misconduct) Regulations 2012 the Panel had a duty to ensure it was kept informed of the handling of such complaints.

Since the previous meeting the following matters have been considered:-

1. A complaint that the former Deputy Commissioner had failed to deal properly with e mail messages from a complainant.

The response has been given that no further action would be taken; however, the complainant is in correspondence with the Legal Adviser.

2. A complaint about the former Commissioner, in respect of which the Legal Adviser had met with the complainants in May 2014.

The complainants had been invited to submit further details of the complaint, but have not done so. The complainants have been informed that the complaint will not be proceeded with.

3. A complaint about the former Commissioner, which is related to the complaint number 2 above.

Because the former Commissioner has resigned, this complaint will not be proceeded with.

The report stated that, after the publication of the Jay report on 26th August 2014, seventeen complaints have been lodged about the actions of the former South Yorkshire Police and Crime Commissioner. Three of those complaints have been referred to the Independent Police Complaints Commission (IPCC), because the allegations related to the potential criminal offence of misconduct in public office. No determination has yet been made by the IPCC regarding these referrals. All of the complaints have been acknowledged and, other than those complaints referred to the IPCC, no further action will be taken because the former Police and Crime Commissioner has resigned from office. In addition a significant number of comments were received by the Legal Adviser, which did not constitute formal complaints and all of the comments have been acknowledged. It was clarified that, to date, there has been no referral of any issue to the Crown Prosecution Service.

Resolved:- That the report be received and the contents noted.

J33. DATES AND TIMES OF FUTURE MEETINGS

Resolved:- That the next meeting of the South Yorkshire Police and Crime Panel shall take place on a date to be arranged, during late March, 2015.