

POLICE AND CRIME PANEL
31st January, 2014

Present:- Councillor Harpham (in the Chair); Councillors Akhtar, Bartlett, Councillor Roger Davison, McHale, Sharman, Sixsmith, Walayat and Carter.

Apologies for absence:- Apologies were received from Councillors Hussain.

J25. QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC

(1) A member of the public referred to Item 7 (Website) on the agenda and asked, if the report was approved, how could the public become more involved in this website development to ensure it was user-friendly?

The Chairman confirmed that the development of the website for the Police and Crime Panel was a key objective as part of the process to engage the public in its work. As part of Item 7 it was proposed that a small working group be convened to consider the design and development of the website with members of community groups being invited to participate.

(2) A member of the public asked could the Police and Crime Commissioner give some clarification on how he sees the changes he wants for the future Pact meetings working and why does he feel they should be chaired by a Councillor or member of the public?

The Chairman advised that this was a question for the Police and Crime Commissioner and was not something the Panel could consider. The question was to be forwarded to the Police and Crime Commissioner's Office for a response.

J26. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETINGS

Consideration was given to the minutes of the previous meetings held on 2nd December, 2013.

With regards to Minute No. J19 (Support Session) Councillor Akhtar made reference to the numbers of religiously motivated attacks and asked the Police and Crime Commissioner if appropriate performance monitoring could be collated to include religion.

The Police and Crime Commissioner gave his assurance that this request would be taken away and looked into further.

Clarification was also sought under this minute on the progress to date on the roles of Local Authority Scrutiny Panels and it was noted that plans were in hand to extend an invitation to Chairpersons of Scrutiny Panels and for this to commence as early as the next meeting.

Reference was also made to Minute No. J20 (Complaints Procedure) and clarification sought on the rules and procedures surrounding an anonymous complaint.

With regards to Minute No. 21 (Policing in Austerity) it was suggested that further information be provided from the Police and Crime Commissioner about the management of future risks.

Resolved:- That the minutes of the previous meetings held on 2nd December, 2013 be agreed as a true record.

J27. PRECEPT PROPOSAL FOR THE YEAR TO 31ST MARCH, 2015

Consideration was given to a report and presentation made by Shaun Wright, Police and Crime Commissioner, and supported by Steve Pick, Treasurer, which detailed his ongoing determination to reduce crime levels and maintain/increase policing visibility.

In accordance with Paragraph 2 of Schedule 5 of the Police Reform and Social Responsibility Act 2011, the Police and Crime Commissioner introduced his proposed precept for the financial year 2014/15 set at a level which increased the annual Band D Council Tax amount by 2%, equivalent to an annual increase of £2.85 (6p per week).

Several factors were taken into account in reaching this position including:-

- The likelihood of future Grant reductions.
- An on-going determination to reduce crime levels and maintain/increase policing visibility.
- The need to dedicate additional resources to particular specialist areas.
- A continuing commitment to invest in Reducing Re-offending, Restorative Justice, Victim Support and Community Safety Initiatives.
- An increased commitment to the protection of vulnerable people.

The general question of 'affordability' had also played into the proposal and in particular the impact on Council Tax payers of increasing the precept by the proposed amount.

The provisional proposal for 2014/15 was that the Precept be increased by £2.85 at Band D.

The Government's 2014/15 Referendum Criteria was still yet to be announced and the proposal presented in this report was consequently provisional and assumed that there would be a 2% limit on Police and Crime Commissioner Precept increases. However, in the event that a higher limit was imposed, the Panel's agreement to a higher Precept increase (max 2.9%; equivalent to £4.13 per annum/8p per week) would

be sought in order to accelerate the planned investment in the Protection of Vulnerable People. If on the other hand the limit was set at a level below the 2% assumption, further net cost reductions would be identified in order to protect the proposed investment in that important area of activity.

The Police and Crime Commissioner explained in more detail as to what would be provided via the proposed budget and his plans to set challenging savings/efficiency targets for the Force during 2014/15.

It was pointed out that the level of Grant from Central Government had been further reduced. On a like for like comparison this reduction amounted to £9.4 million (4.5%) for 2014/15. Approximately £3 million resulted from a 'top slicing' of the National Police Grant to fund National initiatives, including £50 million to establish a 'Police Innovation Fund'; £18 million to build up the capacity of the IPCC; £9 million to increase the frequency of HMIC inspections, £3 million for the College of Policing and £2 million for the National Police Co-ordination Centre.

The Government appeared to remain committed to a Police Funding Review. The possibility that such a Review would produce a detrimental outcome in respect of South Yorkshire had been factored into the consideration of Reserves and the strategy for their future use. Pending the outcome of any Funding Review and using available Home Office indications, including the prospect of greater 'top slicing', it was currently assumed that the Grant would reduce by a further £10 million in 2015/16.

Further information was provided on the precept proposal being predicated on a 2014/15 budget allocation to the Chief Constable of £243.725 million, some £4.264 million of which would be funded from Specific Grants and Contributions initially payable to the Police and Crime Commissioner leaving a Force net budget requirement of £239.461m.

The budget allocation provided funding for the Chief Constable to continue to maintain PCSO numbers at the current level of 328 and also to increase the capacity within the Force to respond to emerging Crime types with a particular emphasis on Public Protection issues. In particular, the proposal allocated more than £2 million for additional activity in this area with an intention to increase this further in 2015/16. Furthermore, if the Precept rules allowed a higher increase this would be used to accelerate this proposal in 2014/15.

The additional efficiency savings target which was allocated to the Force for 2013/14 was on course to be successfully delivered. It was not proposed to impose any further efficiency target for 2014/15, although an overtime reduction target had been agreed with the Chief Constable. In addition, the Force has been asked to seek to accommodate the costs of any necessary Voluntary Early Retirements/Redundancies within the budget amount allocated for 2014/15.

For 2013/14 the overall the Police and Crime Commissioner budget was set at the same level as had been in place for the former Police Authority in 2012/13. For 2014/15 it was intended to seek to operate within a reduced level of budget including a budget for the 'Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner' which was reduced broadly in line with the 2014/15 reduction applicable to the Force.

The Panel recalled that an integral part of the 2013/14 budget decision was the allocation of £4.5m (over 3 years) from Reserves to Partner Organisations to fund their priority initiatives. 2014/15 would be the second year of this three year funding plan. The funding allocations underpinning that budgetary decision were set out in detail as part of the report.

In spite of the Government removing specific funding for Community Safety activities (the Community Safety Fund), the intention was to continue the funding of such activities at the broadly the same level in 2014/15.

In terms of the Reserves Strategy, a minimum working balance had been set aside for unforeseen/unquantifiable threats and/or events. Significant earmarking/commitment of Reserves had now been attached to a number of capital projects which would produce future revenue savings and avoid additional capital financing charges. A further amount was provisionally earmarked to provide future support to the Force budget to allow effective and well planned responses to further grant reductions with a particular emphasis on minimising impacts on front-line policing.

A discussion and a question and answer session ensued and the following issues were raised and clarified:-

- The complication for the Police and Crime Commissioner setting his precept proposal when the Government's Referendum Criteria had not been set.
- Affordability and the plans for a 2-2.9% in the Council Tax charge to taxpayers.
- Reasons for increasing the pressure on taxpayers for less than £400,00 extra income.
- Accuracy of the figures presented.
- The impact of voluntary severance on police officer and support staff numbers when the budget protects PCSO numbers.
- Opportunity for further efficiencies to avoid an increase in the precept.
- The further net cost reductions to protect investments.
- Overall level of reserves.
- Details of investments and service developments.
- Public Protection activity and what this entails.
- Measures to align the spending with similar forces.

- Budget reductions for the Police and Crime Commissioner's Office and the Force budget which seem disproportionate at 2% and 2.6% respectively.
- Reasons for increases in commissioning and partnership activities.
- Uses of the planned capital allocation from the Government.
- Funded capital schemes from reserves and the savings expected to be generated.
- Details of the capital schemes.
- Fluidation of reserves with no indication from the Home Office regarding the costs associated with Hillsborough.
- Referendum threshold and avoidance in South Yorkshire.

The Panel considered all options open to them having listened to the Police and Crime Commissioner's proposals and in his answers to the questions raised.

The Panel were satisfied with the proposals as long as the Police and Crime Commissioner recognised that the eventual precept should not be at such a level as to trigger a referendum once the referendum threshold was known.

Resolved:- (1) That should the maximum Precept increase for Police and Crime Commissioners be 2%, the proposals within the report and the proposed precept increase for 2014/15 at £2.85 per annum (Band D) be endorsed.

(2) That in the event that the maximum Precept increase for Police and Crime Commissioners is greater than 2%, consideration be given to an alternative proposal involving an increase of more than 2% (max 2.9%) with the additional income (max £400k approx.) being matched by an increased investment to accelerate new activity in the Protection of Vulnerable People.

(3) That in the event that the maximum Precept increase for Police and Crime Commissioners is below the current 2% assumption, consideration be given to a Precept increase at that maximum level with the reduced income being matched by net cost reductions not affecting the proposed South Yorkshire Police Budget for 2014/15

(4) That in any event the Panel endorses and reinforces the proposals of the Police and Crime Commissioner and that in making these recommendations the result shall be that the eventual precept shall not be at such a level as to trigger a referendum.

(5) That the Police and Crime Commissioner shall publish his response to these recommendations by forwarding it to the Panel (which will publish the response on its website) and by publishing it on the Commissioner's website.

J28. WEBSITE

Consideration was given to a report presented by Deborah Fellowes, Scrutiny Manager, which set out two options with regard to developing a more effective website presence for the Police and Crime Panel, as part of its approach to increase public engagement in its work.

It was agreed that whilst the Panel was becoming established, developing its ways of working and becoming familiar with its duties and responsibilities, there was little to be gained from seeking community engagement in its formal meetings. It was concluded that the best opportunities to promote its work to the general public were through mechanisms such as its website. The current website for the Panel was a page within the Rotherham Council's website, with limited information about the Panel.

There were two main options that included developing the current web page or to create a "galaxy" web page; effectively a website within the Rotherham website.

It was suggested that the best means of taking this forward was for a small sub-group of the Police and Crime Panel to consider the report in detail and explore the options.

Resolved:- That the report be considered by a small sub-group to be led by Mr. A. Carter, assist by Councillor Sixsmith and that Panel Members be contacted to see who else would like to take this forward.

J29. DRAFT WORK PROGRAMME

Consideration was given to a report presented by Deborah Fellowes, Scrutiny Manager, which presented a draft work programme for consideration, in light of decisions taken at the last meeting in December 2013, which included:-

- Making a request to the Police and Crime Commissioner for timely and regular financial information, including early discussions around the proposed precept.
- Setting up a task and finish group to look at a performance management framework for the Police and Crime Commissioner. Officer support from both the Panel's and the Commissioner's perspective to be incorporated.
- Information sheets on key partner agencies to be provided (Jo Sykes already actioning).
- Consider also establishing a task and finish group to look at Domestic Abuse.
- Development of protocols in conjunction with the Commissioner, Community Safety Partnerships, Local Authority Scrutiny Panels and Criminal Justice Board.
- Development and approval of a work plan.

The work plan as submitted recognised the need for the scheduling of further meetings at an agreed time of 1.00 p.m, with the first being held on Monday, 31st March, 2014.

Resolved:- That the draft work plan be approved.

J30. UPDATE ON THE HANDLING OF COMPLAINTS

Consideration was given to a report presented by Jacqueline Collins, Monitoring Officer, which updated the Panel with regard to the nature and level of complaints that have been received and the action taken.

The following complaints have been received:-

- A complaint that the Police and Crime Commissioner had failed to act in relation to a complaint that had been referred to him and complaints in respect of two members of the staff of the Police and Crime Commissioner

As the complaint against the Police and Crime Commissioner related to the administration of justice, which was not a matter for which the Police and Crime Commissioner had responsibility, it was determined by the Monitoring Officer that the complaint did not fall within the Panel's complaints procedure.

With regard to the complaints relating to the Police and Crime Commissioner's staff, these were not matters that fell to be considered by the Panel and the complainant was referred to the procedures operated by the Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner.

The Monitoring Officer consulted the Chair and the Deputy Chair regarding these matters, who both endorsed the proposed course of action.

- A complaint that the Police and Crime Commissioner had been derogatory in his public comments regarding South Yorkshire Police officers.

The complaint was considered by the Monitoring Officer to be a personal comment which did not fall to be considered under the complaints procedure. The Deputy Chair was consulted and agreed with the proposed course of action. The Chair was not consulted as this complaint was dealt with in the period between the previous and current Chairman being appointed.

- Two further complaints have been received, neither of which had any supporting evidence. Whilst extensive detail was not required it was the responsibility of complainants to provide sufficient

information to enable a preliminary consideration of the complaint to be undertaken. The Panel had no power to conduct its own investigation.

This position had been explained to the complainants who may, if they wish, submit further details.

As a result of a query by a member of the public consideration was to be given to developing guidance for the public as to which complaints should be directed to the Police and Crime Panel, the Police and Crime Commissioner and the Chief Constable.

Resolved:- That the level of complaints and how they have been considered be noted.

J31. DATES AND TIMES OF FUTURE MEETINGS

Consideration was given to the dates and times of future meeting.

It was suggested that this be considered in more detail, but that the next meeting would take place on Monday, 31st March, 2014.

Resolved:- That the next meeting take place at Rotherham Town Hall on Monday, 31st March, 2014 at 1.00 p.m.