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MEETING OF THE HERTFORDSHIRE POLICE AND CRIME PANEL

Thursday 6 February 2025- 6pm

North Hertfordshire District Council
Gernon Road
Letchworth Garden City
Hertfordshire, SG6 3JF

DRAFT MINUTES

(Please note the minutes are a brief summary of the discussion and not intended to be verbatim)

Members Present:	Cllr A Curtis	Broxbourne Borough Council('Chair')
	Cllr Val Bryant	North Herts Council
	Cllr Aga Dychton	Watford Borough Council
	Cllr Reena Ranger OBE	Hertfordshire County Council
	Cllr Andrew Scarth	Three Rivers District Council
	Cllr Harriet Sherlock	St Albans City and District Council
	Cllr Tom Plater	Stevenage Borough Council
	Cllr Duncan Jones	Welwyn Hatfield Borough Council
	Cllr Richard Townsend	East Herts District Council (Remotely)
	Mr Mark Jackson	Independent Member
	Dr Julian Hargreaves	Independent Member
	Dr Malcolm Ramsay	Independent Member(Vice Chair)

Also Present: Mr Jonathan Ash-Edwards, Hertfordshire Police and Crime Commissioner ('PCC')
Mr Ian Rooney, PCC Chief Financial Officer
Mr Gavin Miles, Deputy Chief Executive
Mr Nigel Atkins, Communications Manager
Mr Ibrahim Balta, Clerk to the Police and Crime Panel
Miss Jessica Verdicchio, Interim Head of Legal- Broxbourne Borough Council

- 1 WELCOME**
Chair welcomed everyone to the Hertfordshire Police and Crime Panel meeting.
- 2 APOLOGIES**
None
- 3 MINUTES OF THE MEETING ON 6th December 2024**
The minutes of the meeting on 6th December 2024 were agreed.
- 4 MATTERS ARISING FROM MINUTES**
None

5 QUESTIONS TO THE PANEL FROM THE PUBLIC

None

6 QUESTIONS TO THE POLICE AND CRIME COMMISSIONER FROM THE PUBLIC

Question from County Councillor John Hale- attached.

PCC's response attached.

7 (i) THE PROPOSED POLICE AND CRIME COMMISSIONER'S PRECEPT 2025/26 (ii) REPORT ON THE POLICE PRECEPT CONSULTATION 2025/26

a) Public questions on the proposed precept/precept consultation

None

b) Panel consideration and questions on the proposed precept/precept consultation.

Cllr Bryant's question sent to the PCC in advance (attached).

PCC provided his response and written response to Cllr Bryant's question (attached).

Cllr Bryant: appreciates the financial position inherited, emphasised the importance of community safety, violence against women and girls, some of the money should be left as it government priority.

PCC: explained the difficulty with the budget available and funding that he may not received from government in respect of discretionary spending.

Dr Ramsay: acknowledges gravity and difficulty with the budget, time for difficult decision and reductions in costs in some places, value of policing and within that value of work of Police Community Support Officers ('PCSO'), which we know you strongly appreciate, they are the people the public are most likely to see, they are the people that interact with the public, they are good with negotiating with members of public. We want to avoid a situation in Hertfordshire abolishing PCSO's.

PCC: agree with visible local policing and PCSOs have a role in that. Proposing to protect the PCSOs in this budget. Committed to the neighbourhood policing model and Chief Constable is from a neighbourhood policing background. Two things for direction of travel first funding coming and releasing existing officers into neighbourhood. Update will be provided in due course in respect of officers being set into the neighbourhood frontline. They are focused on more visible more responsibility in the community and the financial budget doesn't negatively impact.

Mr Jackson: stated that he is interested in the areas of savings, what is the impact of those savings section setting PCSOs baseline, slightly confused in the end statement, reducing budgeted establishment 1.42 of the plan seems contradictory.

PCC: explained that the base line is set by Home Office, if you go above the base line needs to be paid by yourself, if it's below you lose the grant, overspent relates to that, numbers high, pay additional amounts compared to the grant and trying to avoid the same happening there.

Cllr Ranger: stated that the government has not funded the National Insurance and that has left you short about £4m, also there are strains with the budget, what is being done, a letter to set that to the ministers.

PCC: stated that there are standstill costs, police pay, rises set nationally but not budgets, increasing National Insurance but not fully funded, it is disappointing because ministers said they will be. The cost of that will be about £4.3m, the grant coming will be less. Most Police and Crime Commissioners have been vocal about that and we have made the points around that and the position hasn't changed.

Dr Ramsay: enquired about how this budget will help number of staff, police officers short on the job, training and possible reduction in the police training. Can the PCC provide re-assurance that he will be making reductions not replacements and taking into account issues in the last inspection report.

PCC: referred to page 5 of the precept report. Stated that they need to ensure police officers time is used where its most important, police officers investigate crime, mix work force, it is positive for moral and positive in terms of impact as there will be better aligned work force. They would like to do more on technology, broader work is to free up time. Further commented that performance is not related to money or size of budget. It's about how the money is used and how constabulary operate, accelerating and making changes will significantly improve performance, big part I am focused on finding way to free up time and to enable officers do better job for our communities and deal with challenges.

Dr Ramsay: it is a additional implication police officers training other than freeing up police officer time.

PCC: Hertfordshire has a young in service work force, we have highest police officer under the age of 26, recruits young in service. Chief Constable focused on empowering people and providing right support, part of freeing up time is for supervisors training and developing their teams.

Cllr Plater: moving police officers from roles and was also in the predecessor's budget to make savings, it was part of the last budget, similarly in this budget report you continued, last Police Effectiveness, Efficiency and Legitimacy report ('PEEL') there was mention of need for improvement in the force control room, how do you feel to meet the PEEL report whilst making officers away from force control rooms.

PCC: there isn't a hiring freeze, broader point is around the mix 4200 staff, focusing on direction of travel around protecting number of police officers, redeploying and using resources where needed and making best use of skills. In terms of performance in the control room, with more people you can do more work and quicker. Slightly increased the overtime budget which will increase performance. More broadly work is being done to improve performance in the control room checking volume of calls, whether a different approach could be taken and technology. Crime recording is also being looked into by the Chief Constable. In respect of PEEL report, measuring the right target, whether there is right number of resources and to meet the target essentially the overtime link is there.

Mr Jackson: the issue of savings and impacts. Reading between various headlines, removing vacant posts, police staff vacancies, increasing police staff vacancies trying to understand the impact of that, other context will have effect, less flexibility touched on small overtime allocation, all those vacancies shall remain, does the overtime budget cater that operation flexibility.

PCC: overtime will always be a challenge. Stated that he has been out with officers and he has seen that an officer is about to finish a shift they get called and carry out an arrest which lead to a couple of hours of overtime. It is hard to predict and plan. We got to drive out back office saving roles as we possibly can, part of the broader review to be done through this year, recourses and teaching productivity. We need careful management; policing is demand led functioning.

Dr Jackson: morale and saving across policing, first area that will get hit. Ring fence number of policing, reducing police number, whether there is a plan to manage that.

PCC: stated that the police staff understand the framework. Talks regularly to Unison and staff bodies they do understand the challenges. I open that dialogue and will be speaking to Unison. The staff are committed to doing a great job for our communities, it is important getting that right, keep those staff, that mix is really important, broader in terms of morale, creating culture and ethos what policing is about in Hertfordshire, broader contact is understood and will keep that line of communication open with police officers and their representatives.

Cllr Ranger: questioned technology and budget for it.

PCC: hoping to be somewhere in the middle, hoping to have money, having some money more broadly. PCC briefly summarised his precept proposal increase of £14 a year for a Band D property and that they will keep working and finding a way through.

Cllr Ranger: no certainty what money is going to come, how do you feel about financial situation.

PCC: it's a challenge we set in the report, I set that in the introduction of the precept report. Balance of making savings where necessary in a way that has minimum impact on the services provided is important.

Cllr Scarth: requested clarification police staff and police officers what does it mean.

PCC: Police officers are warranted constables, staff everyone else including PCSOs and every other member with no powers of arrest, people in control room, digital forensics, support, finance etc.

Cllr Scarth: requested details about police officers on long term sick, maternity leave, staff/police officer retention and reason for police officers leaving the force.

PCC: there are minimum staffing levels for each function, those wouldn't be breached in all circumstances.

Cllr Plater: collaborative functions appears twice and savings to be made, more detail requested how are we making those savings.

PCC: more detailed analysis is provided on page 44-45.

Cllr Plater: Hertfordshire Fire Arms Licensing not meeting targets, what work is done to meet the targets. It is noted that there isn't any savings in firearms which is positive.

PCC: aware of the issue in relation to fire arms. Work to be done on the licensing of fire arms not taking any savings, in fact there has been some investments in those teams, its an area which I have been focusing on the need to increase the service. I can anticipate to update the panel to resolve the issue.

Cllr Plater: what investment is being made to rural policing.

PCC: those who live in rural entitled to same services who live in towns, confident that work being done in that team and talks to those teams in relation to work done, we are not in a bad place in terms of rural.

Cllr Townsend: enquired more in relation costs of training staff and retention.

PCC: explained the retention team, line management structures. Explained that it is sometimes inevitable that staff will have access to other roles, they could see other roles, they do move around. Where possible PCSOs to progress to police constable, some doesn't want to change from PCSOs, bottom line is getting the right people in, right skill, right ethos, right approach to public and training and supporting them to be effective in their role whenever the budget allows practically.

Cllr Bryant: research about the fact what is actually grants available from government. Whether it is known how much of those grants go to Hertfordshire or provisional not confirmed.

PCC: what we know is the main grant which is set out in these papers, it is the neighbourhood policing. Areas which are not known yet for example is safer streets, hotspot respond there is not budget, news hasn't come through yet. No information received about safer streets funding or that programme.

Cllr Scarth: rebuilding of the headquarters and effect.

PCC: overall borrowing and impact revenues for borrowing not insignificant. It is important to say, little cost of not doing well, inefficient set of buildings, police officers and operational people, delivering service to the public, great people and they deserve decent building but that there are challenges. Structure of the building is built, internal fitting stage, the project is on time and budget. Completion is expected next summer. Performance will be improved people getting together and collaborating.

Cllr Scarth: mentioned the crossbow incident Bushey and asked about selling crossbows online or in shops to have a licence as they could be lethal and requested that the Bill to be pushed and if help is needed it will be provided.

PCC: areas to be looked at, it is possible to buy powerful weapons. Has understanding of the Bill going through at the moment.

Cllr Plater: safer streets funding round 6, have you made an application to round 6. There hasn't been application. Requested and application to be submitted.

PCC: that's correct.

Dr Hargreaves: referred to page 72-73 and enquired details about factors used to arrive at this resilience core, Hertfordshire's position amongst similar forces, some of the impact on financial planning.

PCC: page 24 of the report looks at broad financial resilience, reserves borrowing expenditure not of methodology on page 63 looks at Council tax base, lower than average, what that essentially says lower compared to other forces, pointing to Hertfordshire has lower levels of reserves, higher levels of borrowing than other constabularies.

Dr Hargreaves: alluded in the report corrective actions in the median term, that will need to be correct.

PCC: goes back to new headquarters projection, what it means there are pressures around budget in terms of provision about repayment of borrowing, we need to be cautious about pressures and financial pressures, and we need to bring the financial budget in line, we need to ensure that sustainability improves, some of the constraints, who is able to make different decisions around their budgets, we are sadly not in that position, having that focus on that highly in mind.

Dr Hargreaves: so proposed precept increase by £14 for Band D would that move the dial on resilience.

PCC: not particularly referred to page 63 of the precept report, not catching up with other sources.

Mr Jackson: firearms licensing, battle issues relation to murder in Surrey, all the issues fell out of that, what sort of operational risk exposure, issues behind this and trying to balance costs. Risks of the force exposed to, where is it within that priority of that risks.

PCC: certainly a risk, operation for the constabulary not for PCC, they check who is fit for firearms, decision is one of public safety and decision which the constabulary decides, backlog relates to additional checks the government introduced as a higher standard of checks, fit and proper test. The resources hasn't matched the additional rigour of the check. Indicator around that number of applications refused has been going up, appeals against decision. Broad context of the issue is timing of making decisions. constabulary needs to get the timing right but also there is a quiet important balance between timing and quality of decision. Also, the fees for licensing not increased for number of years, government announced that there will be increase in licensing fees, which will mean additional funding which will be used for firearms policing.

Cllr Curtis: notes the £14 limit, if you could raise it more than would you do so?

PCC: I haven't proposed that we do so, page 2 of the precept report sets out the hypothetical question, Hertfordshire precept below England and Wales average. Did test that public, no majority support agreed nor disagreed it depends on how much. There was some public support. Considered that's not where we are. For the precept good levels of support.

Cllr Curtis(Chair): We all have views and opinions.

Cllr Scarth: agreed with it.

Cllr Plater: good budget, if we lost money from this year then impact on subsequent years, proposed to support this budget.

Dr Ramsay: second the proposal and it will be very difficult if we don't agree.

Cllr Curtis(Chair): invited show of hands for the proposed precept budget, those present can only vote, so Cllr Townsend cannot vote. The precept budget increase agreed unanimously. The panel will provide the report in writing by email to the PCCs office.

8 AOB

Cllr Curtis(Chair): New independent member Mr Luke Rigg appointment. The Home Office has approved 4th Independent Member on the Panel.

Control room visit to be arranged. Mr Miles happy to arrange that March- April convenient will communicate to arrange this.

Update to be provided about Chief Constable progress. PCC confirmed excellent start by Chief Constable and is working on priorities Chief Constable as said to the panel his role is keeping people safe and catching criminals and he is moving in the right direction.

10 DATE OF NEXT MEETING 13th MARCH 2025 – BROXBORNE BOROUGH COUNCIL

