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HERTFORDSHIRE POLICE AND CRIME PANEL

Thursday 2 February 2017
Dacorum Borough Council

MINUTES

Members Present: Cllr T Hutchings, Broxbourne Borough Council (Chairman)
Cllr P Choudhury, Hertsmere Borough Council
Mr C Cowdrey, Independent Member (after Item 5)
Cllr S Hodgson, St Albans City and District Council
Cllr I Imarni, Dacorum Borough Council
Mr I Laidlaw-Dickson, Independent Member
Cllr R Martins, Watford Borough Council
Cllr S Reed, East Herts District Council
Cllr P Ruffles, Hertfordshire County Council
Cllr R Trigg, Welwyn Hatfield Borough Council

Also Present: Mr C Head, Clerk to the Police and Crime Panel
Mr D Lloyd, Police and Crime Commissioner
Mr D Gibson, Deputy PCC
Mr R Wilsher, Chief Executive, PCC
Mr C Brace, Proposed Chief Executive, PCC
Mr S Nagler, Assistant PCC
Mr M Collier, Chief Finance Officer, PCC
Mr P Scoins, Senior Communications & Engagement Officer, PCC
Mr C Connolly, Head of Corporate Communications, Herts Constabulary
Mr A Bowden
Cllr H Chapman, Dacorum Borough Council

1 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Cllr M Brooks, Three Rivers District Council. Dr M Ramsay, Independent Member, was present at the start of the meeting but left early due to illness.

2 COUNCILLOR SHERMA BATSON MBE

The Chairman, Panel Members and the Commissioner paid tribute to Sherma Batson, who died on 8 January 2017. A minute's silence was observed.

3 MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF 10 NOVEMBER 2016

The minutes of the meeting were agreed.

4 MATTERS ARISING

There were no matters arising from the minutes.

5 RECRUITMENT OF AN INDEPENDENT MEMBER

Cllr Hodgson reported on the selection process for the vacant independent member position. Five applications had been received and three candidates were interviewed. The interview panel had selected Chris Cowdrey and this was endorsed by the Panel. The Chairman then invited Mr Cowdrey to join the meeting as a member of the Panel.

Cllr Hodgson then requested the Panel's approval to create an additional co-opted member position in order to enable the recruitment of one of the other candidates, whose skills and experience were felt to be beneficial to the Panel. This was approved by the Panel, subject to the agreement of the Secretary of State, as required under the relevant legislation. The Clerk to the Panel was requested to initiate this process.

6 QUESTIONS TO THE POLICE AND CRIME COMMISSIONER FROM THE PUBLIC

Mr Bowden asked the Commissioner why he had felt it necessary to attend a seminar in York in September 2016.

The Commissioner replied that this was in connection with his role on the Hertfordshire Pensions Board, although in the interests of transparency he posts such information on the PCC website.

Mr Bowden asked why the Commissioner did not spend 100% of his time on this role.

The Commissioner replied that he had been elected as a County Councillor as well as PCC and that he was open about his activities. The Chairman noted that many members of the Panel also undertook other roles.

The Commissioner reported that Mr Bowden had on 4 January written him an extensive and helpful letter, and he gave the following response:

I would like to preface my responses to the questions by saying that a detailed budget report is now contained in the papers for this meeting, which gives a fuller exposition of the rationale of the complexities behind the budget making process. I believe this answers some of the concerns underlying the questions more effectively than specific answers to the questions which necessarily have a more narrow focus.

There are a number of questions raised by Mr Bowden about the increase in the precept. The first relates to the Athena project.

1. How much has been spent on it to date?

A total of £32m will be invested in Athena over a 10 year period. This is being funded by the nine forces who have signed up to the new system. Money has also

been secured through successful police innovation fund bids. If more forces sign up to Athena in the future the cost of the system will be spread further.

2. Why has it been delayed and has anyone been held accountable?

In the first two forces a number of issues arose in the bedding-in process which meant the implementation process was delayed. Although working in Essex, Norfolk and Suffolk, a technical review highlighted concerns around the infrastructure of Athena and its capacity of managing further forces. As a result a plan had to be agreed in order to address these concerns, prior to any additional forces being able to commit to their implementation. It is important to emphasise that these do not relate to Athena as a system or to the development work being carried out within BCH.

Athena will be replacing a number of different systems and will affect over 8,000 staff and officers across BCH. It is therefore absolutely vital that it is fit for operational policing and implementation is a major programme of work.

The supplier is being held to account by the consortium's commercial and legal team, and much of the cost of the remedial work is being completed at the supplier's expense.

We have had regular meetings and the Joint Athena Management Board has held Northgate to account over the last year.

3. How much will need to be spent on it and over what time?

No additional costs have been incurred in relation to the procurement of Athena as a result of the delay.

4. When is the implementation date, if it's ever going to happen?

We are now anticipating that launch will be January 2018 and are currently working on a detailed implementation plan for launch. It should also be noted that we already have some staff within Bedfordshire, Cambridgeshire and Hertfordshire who are part of ERSOU already using the system.

5. What are the projected savings and over what period of time?

By introducing Athena it costs more, but you have to set up an information management unit, but the long-term efficiency of officers and shared resources opens up more savings. A number of the collaboration savings we've hoped to make in the control room are required to have Athena to be implemented before they are achieved. Athena is designed to improve policing rather than save money. It will however provide the opportunity for benefits and efficiencies within all three forces and be an enabler for any future collaboration both across BCH and the region.

6. What are the assurances being given to ensure it's not a "white elephant"?

As previously stated it is important to emphasise that the concerns expressed do not relate to Athena as a system. The three forces remain fully committed to Athena and the benefits it will bring. It is already being used within Essex, Norfolk

and Suffolk where they have seen the benefits of being able to share information and we will continue to learn from these and other forces as they 'go live'. The contractor is being closely managed and external advice is also included to ensure the management organisation is effective.

The second section of questions related to the section in our Open Letter which said: "I...asked the Chief Constable to come up with some alternative savings plans. He has done so, but tells me he can only reach the target by reducing local policing teams."

Mr Bowden asks:

7. What costings and analyses have been undertaken, if any, to support the CC's claims?

The CC was asked to provide a report to explain what savings would need to be made to the existing budget – i.e. if there was no increase – and the answer was that neighbourhood policing was going to be at risk. All budget heads are considered for savings and local policing as one of the substantial ones was obviously included. I indicated that I did not want to look for savings there. I've always started at a point of freezing the council tax, and not assuming any increase. Incidentally if the band D precept had kept pace with CPI since 2012/13 (first year of PCCs) it would be £158.84 in 2017/18 or £172.23 if it had kept pace with CPI since 2010/11 (when it was last increased).

8. Has DL challenged those claims, and if so, how and on what basis – or has DL simply accepted the CC's comments at face value without any detailed scrutiny?

There are routine meetings with the CC, both weekly formal and informal meetings and also a monthly senior executive board at which there was detailed scrutiny at several points and finally presented at the SEB of the 16th December. Detailed scrutiny of the proposed budget and questioning of the CC and his Director of Resources took place.

Mr Bowden's next issue is the size of the reserves. He says the reserves would adequately cover the costs of Athena savings and should be taken from there. He says our reserves are c£48m including over £9m for the implementation of Athena. His question is those accounts were signed off at the end of September and yet 3 months later he is asking for an increase.

9. He asks what's changed.

Nothing has changed; this is the working through of a policy of measured and prudent use of reserves. In deciding on the rate at which reserves should be used, it is important to look to the long term and not just one year in isolation. Table 7 on page 21 of the report shows full use of the Base Budget reserve over the next five years. If the full amount were to be used in one year, we would face a 'cliff-edge' the following year which would not be realistic. The table shows projected reserves at the end of the Medium Term Plan period to be £10.2m – remarkably close to what Mr Bowden says that they should be.

In last year's (2016/17) budget report the Ops and Org Support savings were projected at £2.6m for 2017/18. As we have reported to SEB, since September the savings we can achieve are lower and slower than was projected. We are building

£1.1m savings in 2017/18 for Ops and Org Support (£1.5m lower than projected, although the risk of achieving the full savings this was set out in the 2016/17 report). The 2016/17 budget report also highlighted that there were saving gaps from 2017/18 (£0.7m) - as with other forces there is the on-going challenge arising from government grant reduction.

The 2016/17 budget set out a medium-term plan for drawing down on the reserves, which whilst we adjust each year we are drawing on – so the use of reserves over the medium term is built into the plan.

The 2017/18 budget report highlights that we have generated £47m of on-going savings since 2011/12.

Mr Bowden makes a point about the size of the office. He says there are 21 staff in the OPCC at the moment and we are increasing. He asks:

10. Why don't we work under the same financial constraints as other forces (mentions Beds and Cambs specifically) and are you just "empire building"?

The OPCC does work under the same financial constraints and I'm not empire building. Our staffing costs are benchmarked against other roles externally and within the Constabulary.

11. What are the future staff proposals and what are the costs?

There are no significant proposals to change the staffing structure at the moment though with a new Chief Executive due to start in the spring I would expect him to review the fitness for purpose for the office at an early stage. As required by law I am considering whether emergency service collaboration might be improved by a change in governance. This may have implications for staffing if, for instance, I were to become the employer for fire and rescue service staff.

The other questions are really more suited for the Panel and not for the Commissioner.

7 QUESTIONS TO THE PANEL FROM THE PUBLIC

Mr Bowden asked why the Chief Constable had not been invited to this meeting. The Chairman replied that the Chief Constable has an open invitation to attend.

8 PCC'S DRAFT POLICE AND CRIME PLAN 2017 – 2022

8(a) Questions from the public

There were no questions from the public.

8(b) Questions from the Panel

The Commissioner gave a brief introduction to the Plan.

Mr Laidlaw-Dickson welcomed the commitment to addressing the issue of modern slavery and asked how the Commissioner and the Chief Constable were going to make an impact.

The Commissioner replied that this was a complex issue, which was not just about policing but depended on broader community engagement. He referred to a forthcoming joint conference with the Shiva Foundation and extended an invitation to Panel members.

Cllr Martins noted that mental health is a major issue and asked whether a more proactive approach could be taken and more done with regard to safeguarding training.

The Commissioner agreed that it was important to ensure better training and support for vulnerable people. He reported that he had signed the Mental Health Care Concordat. He welcomed the street triage initiative which incorporates mental health experts into street teams and control rooms, enabling a police intervention to be diverted to a health intervention.

Cllr Imarni noted that cyber crime is of increasing concern and asked why no budget had been set aside to upskill the force in this area.

The Commissioner replied that cyber crime is any crime that uses an element of the cyber world (e.g. the internet, social media) and so covers a very wide range of issues. Therefore the training is not specialised, but is incorporated in the normal training for modern day policing.

The Chairman noted the Commissioner's wish to speed up the criminal process and asked about progress in this area.

The Commissioner reported that there had been on the previous day a meeting of the Criminal Justice Board, which he chairs, and that he sits on the national Criminal Justice Board. He said that trying to join up the whole system is the most exciting thing that can be done to change what it's like to be a victim of crime in Hertfordshire and to change the likelihood of being a victim. He believes that, if we can work out where the wrinkles are in the system, we can make a step change.

The Chairman agreed that looking after the victim is very important.

Cllr Hodgson made reference to an article in local papers on the previous day that claimed that Hertfordshire Police was trying to keep serious crimes out of the press and away from the public. He invited the Commissioner to comment on that in the context of his transparency agenda.

The Commissioner replied that it was his role to hold the Chief Constable to account. It was helpful to be able to see if there are things that he was not hearing about, but he did not think that this was the case.

Cllr Hodgson referred to the Commissioner's wish, expressed in the Plan, to maintain a strong level of reserves and asked how this could be reconciled with the stated ambition in the budget to steadily use those reserves.

The Commissioner responded that he feels that the level of reserves is currently too high. CIPFA guidelines indicate that a reserve level of around £10 million would be sufficient. The figure in itself is not important, but the point is that they are monies that have been built up over the years that haven't been spent on policing.

Mr Cowdrey commented that the Plan was very comprehensive but asked how the Commissioner intended to prove delivery and measure outcomes.

The Commissioner replied that it is for the Constabulary to work through the delivery element. He said that the last Home Secretary had been very clear that we should move away from targets in policing as they give perverse results, so they have been replaced by a more generic plan.

Mr Cowdrey noted that there was nothing in the Plan about stemming crime before it happens by working with schools, youth groups and so on.

The Commissioner replied that the first words in the Plan are 'Everybody's Business' and that this is a golden thread running through the Plan. The whole basis of the Plan is the need to work collaboratively with all partners in the private and public sectors.

Cllr Imarni referred to the estates management element of the Plan and asked why the associated income doesn't appear until 2021.

The Commissioner replied that the estates strategy is necessarily not a short term matter, but discussions are currently in progress with councils and others with regard to a number of assets across the county, looking for commercial outcomes that also enable appropriate public access and availability.

The Panel agreed to support the Commissioner's Police and Crime Plan.

9 THE PROPOSED POLICE AND CRIME COMMISSIONER'S PRECEPT

The Commissioner introduce the precept proposals. He said that the decision to increase was taken in the context of the financial situation now and that he would only raise the precept when needed. The financial pressures had led him to conclude that he had to increase the precept by £5 or reduce the numbers in local neighbourhood policing.

He reported that he had received 261 responses to his consultation, of which 196 were in favour of an increase, 34 did not wish to comment and 31 disagreed.

9(a) Questions from the public

Mr Bowden asked the Commissioner whether he could confirm that he was projecting an increase in the precept for each of the next five years.

The Commissioner confirmed that he is only proposing a £5 increase for the coming year. There is no implication of an increase thereafter. The position will be reviewed in a year's time.

Cllr Chapman asked if the proposed budget was just to maintain the status quo or to increase the police presence.

The Commissioner replied that the money raised will not just ensure that local police stays at the same level. It will also ensure that areas of greater vulnerability, such as domestic abuse, get the funding that they require.

9(b) Questions from the Panel

The Chairman noted that this was a significant turnaround from a previous reduction in the precept to a £5 increase now and asked the Commissioner to comment.

The Commissioner said that he made it clear last year that he would charge the right amount. At that time he was of the belief that the collaboration savings would materialise and had not anticipated that the settlement from central government would reduce by £1.5million. He commented that when the facts change, he changes his opinion. If he is able not to increase next year, he will not.

The Chairman asked how likely it was that the savings would be achieved this year.

The Commissioner replied that a consequence of collaboration is that he is not solely responsible for the achievement of savings.

Cllr Hodgson asked if there was a medium term strategy for council tax.

The Commissioner replied that the medium term strategy was not in the budget report but was addressed in the Police and Crime Plan (page 50).

Cllr Hodgson queried the increase in the office budget from £1 million to £1.6 million.

The Commissioner replied that he had kept the budget at £1 million for the first four years, but the role of the PCC had changed significantly. He said that it is a very efficient office with very few people in it.

Mr Laidlaw-Dickson commented that there is a tension between the local policing model and other requirements, and that the local policing team might be seen as a 'rainy day' fund. He asked the Commissioner how he balances the tensions between major crime and the reassurance agenda.

The Commissioner replied that both he and the Chief Constable believed in neighbourhood policing. The strategic policing requirement does create a tension and the most serious crime needs specialist funding, but local policing is not regarded as a 'rainy day' fund.

The Chairman asked if the establishment was at the right level.

The Commissioner replied that the Chief Constable believes that it is. They are currently undertaking an exercise on demand management. It is for the Chief Constable to determine the establishment number required to deliver the Plan.

Mr Cowdrey asked how the Commissioner would ensure that the budgeted numbers did not change.

The Commissioner replied that this is difficult as 50% of activities are carried out in collaboration with other organisations, and it can be that overall numbers of staff come down but the outcomes are achieved. So it is far more subtle than just the hard numbers.

Cllr Choudhury noted that last year the Commissioner had been able to maintain the number of PCSOs and asked if he was able to absorb the reduction in local authority funding.

The Commissioner said that PCSOs are key to local policing It is not unreasonable that organisations that withdraw funding will no longer be able to demand a PCSO presence at a particular location. Their deployment will be considered as part of the demand management exercise referred to earlier and determined on an operational basis.

The Panel agreed to support the Commissioner's proposed precept of £152.00 for Band D properties.

10 ANY OTHER BUSINESS

The Chairman reported as follows:

- the next meeting of the Eastern Region PCP Network has been set for 17 February which he will attend.
- the next meeting of the Tri-County PCP collaboration group has been set for 27 March, which he and the Clerk will attend.
- a Training Day for all members has been arranged for 4 July 2017; more details will follow nearer the time. Cllr Trigg offered Welwyn Hatfield's Council Chamber as a venue for this.
- discussions are taking place with the University of Hertfordshire with regard to the possibility of recruiting an intern.

A request was made for a list of meetings for the coming year to be published.

Action: the Clerk to the Panel

11 DATE OF THE NEXT MEETING

The next meeting of the Panel is on Thursday 15 June 2017 at Three Rivers District Council.