



HERTFORDSHIRE POLICE AND CRIME PANEL

Thursday 23 January 2014
Watford Borough Council

MINUTES

Present

Cllr R Hannam, Broxbourne Borough Council (Chairman)
Cllr M Alexander, East Herts District Council
Cllr Ms S Bedford, Three Rivers District Council
Cllr R Henry (substitute), Stevenage Borough Council
Mr I Laidlaw-Dickson, Co-opted member
Cty Cllr P Ruffles, Hertfordshire County Council
Cllr D Scudder, Watford Borough Council
Dr M Verlot, Co-opted member

Also Present

Cllr R Martins, Watford Borough Council
Mr G Miles, Broxbourne Borough Council
Mr T Hewins, Broxbourne Borough Council
Mr D Lloyd, Police and Crime Commissioner (PCC)
Mr D Gibson, Deputy PCC
Mr J Hurley, PCC Chief Financial Officer
Mr S Nagler, Chairman of the PCC Audit Committee
Cllr N Bell, Watford Borough Council
Cllr Ms A Joynes, Watford Borough Council
Cllr A Khan, Watford Borough Council
Cllr K McLeod, Watford Borough Council

5 members of the public attended.

1 INTRODUCTIONS, APOLOGIES AND WELCOME

Apologies

Cllr Mrs A Brewster, St Albans City and District Council
Cllr A Franey Welwyn Hatfield District Council
Cllr C Goldstein, Hertsmere Borough Council
Cllr N Harden, Dacorum Borough Council
Cllr T Hunter, North Hertfordshire District Council
Cllr Ms S Taylor, Stevenage Borough Council
Mr J Stack, Broxbourne Borough Council
Mr R Wilsher, PCC Chief Executive
Ms D Currie, Deputy PCC Chief Executive
Mr J Bugg, Office of the PCC

2 MINUTES OF THE MEETINGS OF 21 NOVEMBER 2013

The minutes of the meeting were agreed.

3 MATTERS ARISING

Mr Miles advised that the following reports will be tabled by the Commissioner at the next meeting:

- review of the integrity of crime statistics reported by the Constabulary;
- progress with the Police and Crime Plan; and
- transparency of statutory reports published by the Commissioner.

4 PUBLIC QUESTIONS TO THE POLICE AND CRIME COMMISSIONER

Cllr Bell asked the Commissioner how he can ensure neighbourhood policing is retained in Hertfordshire and whether he can provide assurances against front line cuts. The Commissioner stated that the Chief Constable decides what is needed operationally to keep crime low. There is a commitment to keep neighbourhood policing, as it is important to preserve a police station and Chief Inspector in each borough.

Cllr Joynes queried how in the tough financial climate and amid the increase in domestic violence offences (year to date) the Commissioner allocates funding to domestic violence, particularly when the local women's centre is struggling financially. The Commissioner advised that community groups can bid for money from the Commissioner's Community Fund. Although the increase in domestic violence offences is a concern, it is also reassuring that people are reporting these crimes as it typically takes over 30 incidents of abuse before a person reports the problem to the police.

Cllr Martins raised concerns that minority groups are underreporting crime and asked how the Commissioner communicates to these groups. The Commissioner commented that this was a cultural issue and many communities choose not to report crime, which includes groups of people who are not ethnic minorities. It is important to visit hard to reach communities and the Commissioner cited a recent visit to a mosque.

Cllr Martins suggested ethnic minorities underreporting crime is due to their confidence in policing, which is not helped by coverage in the national press, and until people are satisfied that the police treat all groups in the same manner this will continue to be an issue. The Commissioner noted that the Constabulary's employment policy has no 'glass ceiling' based on gender, race or sexuality. It is important this inclusiveness is practised in the street so people have confidence in the local police.

Cllr Khan suggested that the recruitment of females from minority groups by the Constabulary could help to encourage victims of domestic violence to report crimes. Cllr Khan also queried whether the Commissioner had ruled out contracts with G4S in future. The Commissioner agreed that recruiting female specials is a good way to reach unrepresented communities. The Constabulary currently has no contracts with G4S and the facts will always be considered when a contract decision needs to be made. Mr Hurley clarified that the Constabulary currently has a contract with G4S for the provision of Force Medical Examiners, as is the case with neighbouring forces in the region.

5 PUBLIC QUESTIONS TO THE POLICE AND CRIME PANEL

None

6 PANEL TO ASSIST WITH REVIEW OF PCC CHIEF EXECUTIVE

The Commissioner's Chief Executive is a seconded officer shared with Hertfordshire County Council. The Commissioner intended to review the arrangement after 12 months. However, the Commissioner's office move resulted in significant gaps in the office establishment which are only being filled now so the Commissioner suggested extending the review period to November 2014.

AGREED that the Commissioner submits a report on his proposals for his Chief Executive's role to the Panel's meeting in November 2014.

7 THE PROPOSED POLICE AND CRIME COMMISSIONER'S PRECEPT

Mr Hurley introduced the Commissioner's precept and budget proposal. The provisional settlement information from the Home Office and the provisional tax base information from district councils have enabled the Commissioner to freeze the precept again. Additionally, it has been confirmed that Hertfordshire alongside Bedfordshire and Cambridgeshire will receive innovation funds of £1.9 million from the Government to support capital investment in back office functions and mobile technology. The Commissioner advised that this was different to his initial plans of a 3.4% increase because of the better than expected settlement for policing from the Government and the underspend from the previous year.

Mr Hurley stated that the Government has provided settlement totals for 2014/15 and 2015/16, whereas there is less certainty for 2016/17 and 2017/18 and the projections will be updated following the general election in 2015. The Government's funding announcement for policing, including the council tax freeze grants, has removed the 2016/17 funding 'cliff edge'. The projected 'standstill' spending pressures are forecast as £15.6 million by 2017/18, which assumes a

public sector pay rise of 1% in 2014 and 2015, removal of employer's national insurance rebates in 2016 and investment in response to new demands and the changing pattern of criminality. The Constabulary has reserves totalling £34 million and it is anticipated £10.8 million will be spent over the next four years. The reserves may also be used to meet one-off collaboration set-up costs and address delays in generating savings.

Mr Hurley advised that the Constabulary has generated ongoing savings of £35 million over the last four years, but a further projected £17.8 million of savings will need to be made by 2017/18. The Chief Constable has a target to reduce business and operational support costs by 30%. This is to be achieved through drawing on greater economies of scale as part of the collaboration with Bedfordshire and Cambridgeshire. There is a 10% savings target for specialist policing as part of the collaboration arrangements. Savings in business and operational support enable neighbourhood policing to be protected.

(a) Public questions on the proposed precept

Cllr Martins acknowledged the financial constraints placed on policing resources but queried how confident the Commissioner was in tackling the increased crime associated with the predicted population increases. The Commissioner indicated the statistics suggest that there is no link between population growth and increased crime. The population in Hertfordshire has increased by 10% during the last 10 years and crime has halved.

Cllr McLeod asked how it was possible to save £17.8 million over the next four years if additional funds are not raised via council tax. The Commissioner stated that £17.8 million represents approximately 9% of the policing budget. The majority of funding for policing is from the Government and, to put the precept contribution in perspective, a 3.3% precept rise would raise an additional £2 million. The collaboration with Bedfordshire and Cambridgeshire will deliver savings. The Constabulary has a good level of reserves if there are delays in achieving savings. The precept proposal is for 2014/15 and it will be reviewed each year. It is a balanced budget and the risks are reasonable.

Mr Williams noted the £1.1 million allocated for priority investment and asked whether this was a suitable amount of money for the issues covered, for example, dealing with child sexual exploitation cases. The Commissioner advised that £100,000 has been allocated to employ a communications data investigator and a one year cybercrime co-ordinator role as part of a hi-tech cybercrime unit. This will determine the extent of the problem. The investment is on the advice of the Chief Constable and will be reviewed as required.

Cllr Khan queried how tackling domestic violence will be funded. The Commissioner advised that Hertfordshire County Council's community safety unit and the local intervention and neighbourhood policing teams deal with this issue. Victim support will also fall under the remit of the Commissioner from October 2014.

Cllr Bell asked whether the reserves are too high and if more could be utilised as part of the policing budget. Mr Hurley emphasised the Constabulary's obligation to plan ahead and use resources appropriately. There is a requirement to hold at least

£5 million in reserves. A significant change programme will be implemented during the next four years which will incur substantial one off costs. It is too early to gauge the exact budgetary position in subsequent years and additional reserves may need to be used.

(b) Panel consideration of the proposed budget

Cllr Ruffles supported the precept freeze, although he understood that some electors would rather pay more, particularly if this is a short term, political decision. The Commissioner suggested people don't normally prefer to pay more. The response to the Commissioner's open letter in November 2013 indicated people would be happy to pay £5 more for policing. However, circumstances changed from the initial proposal to increase the precept level, as there was a better than anticipated Government grant, the retention of the council tax freeze grant and underspend from the previous year. The precept level will be reconsidered next year.

Cllr Henry welcomed the commitment to retain neighbourhood policing and police community support officers (PCSOs). Cllr Henry asked for clarification as to what services will be subject to collaboration with Bedfordshire and Cambridgeshire. The Commissioner advised that the business cases will be developed over time but principally services which do not need to be undertaken locally, such as the control room, IT, legal and human resources.

Cllr Bedford raised concerns about the recruitment and retention levels of PCSOs, particularly in South Oxley where there is only one PCSO. The Commissioner acknowledged it was unfortunate when the numbers of PCSOs are reduced. However, this is often because younger PCSOs become police constables. Until it was confirmed neighbourhood policing would be retained in its current format, the decision was taken to not actively recruit PCSOs. There will be 24 new PCSOs joining the Constabulary in the last week of January 2014. Cllr Bedford suggested the lead time to recruit PCSOs was too long. The Commissioner commented that it was a mistake to think all areas of the county are understaffed.

Mr Laidlaw-Dickson supported the precept proposal and asked whether the £7 million underspend meant policing was under resourced in 2013/14. Mr Laidlaw-Dickson queried what impact on operational policing collaboration with Bedfordshire and Cambridgeshire would have and whether Hertfordshire would be subsidising the other police forces, particularly in regards to Bedfordshire's difficult financial position. The Commissioner commented that the underspend was planned and as crime reduced it could be argued the budget was at the correct level. Although Bedfordshire and Cambridgeshire may need collaboration more, it is needed in Hertfordshire to achieve the savings required. As long as savings are made in Hertfordshire, it does not matter if the other police forces achieve greater savings. The reserves are there in case the savings are not immediate. The priority is that collaboration is for the benefit of Hertfordshire's residents. Mr Hurley advised that the change management reserve was £23 million, which will be used for the collaboration set up costs and contingency arrangements.

The Chairman asked how the set up costs would be split between the three counties. Mr Hurley advised it is based on the relative size of budget of the three

forces with Hertfordshire funding 44%, Cambridgeshire 31% and Bedfordshire 25%.

Cllr Alexander raised concerns at using the reserves as a safety net as once the money is used it is no longer available, and asked whether the Chief Constable is confident he can deliver policing with the available resources. The Commissioner confirmed the Chief Constable is comfortable with the budget, which is helped by the dual role of the Chief Financial Officer working for the Commissioner's office and the Constabulary. The Commissioner suggested the reserves are available if there is a problem and should not be used as an investment tool. In a less volatile economic climate there would be no need to have such large reserves. The Chief Financial Officer has cautiously put in place strong contingency arrangements.

Cllr Scudder queried whether experience of past savings gave confidence for the future. The Commissioner outlined that £8 million of savings have been made as part of the collaboration with Bedfordshire and Cambridgeshire. Lessons have been learnt as to what does and does not work. The collaboration will focus on areas of policing which could be sold, i.e. IT, legal and human resources.

It was MOVED, SECONDED AND AGREED that the Panel supports the Commissioner's proposed precept.

8 ANY OTHER BUSINESS

The Chairman advised that 10 applications had been made for the independent member vacancy which closed on 17 January 2014.

9 DATE OF THE NEXT MEETING

7pm, Thursday 13 February 2014 – St Albans City and District Council