



HERTFORDSHIRE POLICE AND CRIME PANEL

MAIN MEETING

Thursday 25 July 2013
Stevenage Borough Council

MINUTES

Present

Cllr R Hannam, Broxbourne Borough Council (Chairman)
Cllr M Alexander, East Herts District Council
Cllr Mrs A Brewster, St Albans City and District Council
Cllr J Dean, Welwyn Hatfield District Council
Ms A Francis, Co-opted Member
Cllr C Goldstein, Hertsmere Borough Council
Cllr N Harden, Dacorum Borough Council
Cllr T Hunter, North Hertfordshire District Council
Mr I Laidlaw-Dickson, Co-opted member
Cty Cllr P Ruffles, Hertfordshire County Council
Cllr D Scudder, Watford Borough Council
Cllr Ms S Taylor, Stevenage Borough Council

Also Present

Cllr Ms S Bedford, Three Rivers District Council
Cllr A Franey (substitute), Welwyn Hatfield District Council
Mr J Stack, Broxbourne Borough Council
Mr G Miles, Broxbourne Borough Council
Mr T Hewins, Broxbourne Borough Council
Mr D Lloyd, Police and Crime Commissioner
Mr D Gibson, proposed Deputy Police and Crime Commissioner
Mr R Wilsher, PCC Chief Executive

10 members of the public attended.

1 INTRODUCTIONS, APOLOGIES AND WELCOME

Apologies

Cllr R Seabourne, Three Rivers District Council
Cllr S Drury, Three Rivers District Council
Dr M Verlot, Co-opted member
Mr J Bugg, Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner
Ms D Currie, PCC Deputy Chief Executive

2 APPOINTMENT OF VICE-CHAIRMAN

Councillor Malcolm Alexander was nominated as Vice-Chairman of the Panel. Ms Annabel Francis was also nominated. The Chairman requested members to vote by a show of hands.

The Panel reappointed Cllr Malcolm Alexander, East Herts District Council, as Vice-Chairman.

3 MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF 20 JUNE 2013

Agreed.

4 MATTERS ARISING

(a) Questions referred to the PCC for comment

Possible answers to the questions (attached as appendix A) were tabled at the meeting, with the exception of question number eight. The Panel approved those answers. With regard to question eight, Cllr Taylor suggested the Commissioner should be sensitive to the financial constraints of residents in Hertfordshire. Ms Francis expressed surprise at the gifts and hospitalities accepted for a person in a public role. Cllr Bedford stated the Commissioner, as an elected representative, will stand or fall at the next election. Cllr Dean emphasised that it is possible to undertake business at the same time as receiving hospitality but that if such hospitality is provided in order to influence the Commissioner's decisions that would be wrong.

(b) Panel member support and training

Mr Laidlaw-Dickson welcomed the training available and suggested a workshop on effective work programming, questioning and leadership skills, and clarity over mutual roles and responsibilities would be helpful. Cllr Goldstein and Cllr Harden advocated training on how the Panel can work more effectively with the Commissioner. Cllr Taylor emphasised the importance of training on performance management so progress against the Police and Crime Plan can be tracked. Cllr Bedford suggested two or three sessions would be more beneficial than covering all topics in one day.

(c) PCC schedule of specified information for publication

Mr Laidlaw-Dickson queried why the status column in paragraph five of the schedule was blank. The Commissioner confirmed it was not relevant because no public meetings had been scheduled by the Commissioner to discuss a specific topic or issue. It was confirmed that the term 'elected local policing body' referred to the Commissioner.

5 PUBLIC QUESTIONS TO THE POLICE AND CRIME COMMISSIONER

Mr Ryan asked for confirmation that Mr Gibson had not started in the role of Deputy Commissioner yet and will not do so until the confirmation hearing process is complete. The Commissioner confirmed this was the case.

Mr Ryan enquired whether Mr Gibson has a criminal record and if a CRB check has been undertaken. The Commissioner advised the CRB check does not take place until after the confirmation hearing and there is no reason to disbelieve Mr Gibson's assertion that he has no criminal record.

Mr Munday asked how the Commissioner will work with partners to reduce crime. The Commissioner commented that partnership working, including with health, borough and district councils, Hertfordshire County Council and probation, is essential for tackling problems such as domestic violence. There are cross working opportunities, as demonstrated by a member of probation staff working in the Commissioner's office. The Commissioner meets monthly with local authority community safety portfolio holders and there is a Community Safety Board meeting with partners to discuss a wide range of issues.

Mr Munday highlighted that staff morale is vital to maintaining high standards of policing and queried, following local and national cuts to policing, what the Constabulary's morale is like. The Commissioner suggested a key component of maintaining morale is to be part of a winning team and, due to the hard work of the Constabulary, crime continues to fall to unprecedented low levels in Hertfordshire. This has been recognised at a national level as the Prime Minister and Home Secretary recently visited the Borough of Broxbourne because Hertfordshire has one of the highest crime detection rates in the country. On the other hand, it is a tough time to be in the public sector and the police are being asked to do more with less. The Commissioner acknowledged the need to be open and make budgetary decisions early.

Mr Ryan commented on the Commissioner's schedule of specified information for publication, as Mr Ryan felt compliance with statutory reporting duties was not apparent. The Commissioner advised that the information is published as soon as is practical and within the spirit and the letter of the law. The process is transparent and as quick as possible. Despite the relatively small office, the publications go beyond the legal requirement.

Mr Munday asked what proposals will be taken forwards to encourage wider public engagement in policing. The Commissioner stated the Police and Crime Plan caught the imagination of the public and it was important to continue to engage with the public, for instance, by visiting the different localities.

6 QUESTIONS TO THE PANEL

Mr Ryan supplied a written question to the Panel on the Commissioner's compliance with statutory reporting duties. The answers to the written question were answered by the Panel at the meeting as part of item 4.a. The member referred to in the written question is

Councillor Goldstein. Mr Ryan asked why reporting expenditure over £500 is not complete. Mr Wilsher advised that all expenditure over £500 by the Constabulary and the Commissioner is routinely published on the Constabulary's website.

Mr Munday asked the Panel what challenges have been faced in acclimatising to the new role the Panel has. The Chairman cited difficulties about asking the most appropriate questions of the Commissioner to get the desired answers. Cllr Harden acknowledged that the legislation restricts what the Panel can do and it is important to maximise the scrutiny of the Commissioner at Panel meetings. Cllr Dean suggested the proposed training sessions will help to resolve these early hindrances. Mr Laidlaw-Dickson indicated establishing a suitable framework to scrutinise the Commissioner was challenging. More difficult questions need to be asked of the Commissioner. It would be helpful for the Commissioner to provide an update of the performance indicators from the Police and Crime Plan at each Panel meeting.

Mr Cash asked the Panel what it considered the biggest challenges to policing are. Cllr Bedford commented that maintaining police visibility will be a challenge. Cllr Alexander cited Government interference as a concern. Cllr Brewster noted speeding and metal theft were particular issues in her rural community. Ms Francis indicated domestic violence was a very significant problem.

7 REVIEW OF THE PANEL WEBSITE

Cllr Bedford suggested it was difficult to find the link to the Commissioner's website, the language used to describe the role and responsibilities of the Panel should be clearer and that there is a picture of a PCSO incorrectly labelled as a police officer. Cllr Harden noted the pictures are of the Constabulary and there are no pictures of the Panel at work. Mr Laidlaw-Dickson commented the montage header is of the old Police Authority and, rather than just direct links to the homepage of the Commissioner's website, there could be links to specific pages within the Commissioner's website. Cllr Bedford noted that some of the photographs of Panel members are distorted. Cllr Brewster commented that a webcast facility on the website is not possible because not all local authorities can offer this capability, although it would be a welcome addition.

8 REPORT OF THE PCC CHIEF EXECUTIVE ON COMPLAINT HANDLING

Cllr Harden queried what happens if a member of the public makes a complaint to the Commissioner's office about the Constabulary. Mr Wilsher advised these complaints are passed onto the police standards department within the police. If the complaint is not resolved satisfactorily, the complaint is forwarded to the Independent Police Complaints Commission. The Commissioner is not a substitute or an addition to this process.

The Chairman suggested it would be useful if the top five complaint categories were reported to the Panel so the Panel can determine what the Commissioner has done to resolve problems. The Commissioner commented he will reflect on this suggestion. Records of complaints are helpful for the Commissioner to hold the Chief Constable to account, but the powers are not the same as what the old Police Authority had. There is a specific legal process and it would be inappropriate to interfere with police discipline and other issues. Mr Laidlaw-Dickson acknowledged the system is complicated. However, it

would be helpful if the Panel could have a brief description of the complaints process and information on the number of complaints by type of complaint.

9 ANNUAL REPORT OF THE PCC

Public questions

Mr Munday asked what the most positive aspect of the report is. The Commissioner commented that crime is down 15% compared to the year before, although there were still 53,000 crimes in Hertfordshire, but this is down from circa 100,000 approximately seven years ago. It is important that public awareness is increased of how safe the county is.

Ms Cash acknowledged that the figures show a fall in incidents of domestic violence but asked what arrangements are in place to ensure the drop is for the right reasons. The Commissioner advised it is a certainty that not all incidents of domestic violence are reported and it typically takes over 30 incidents of abuse before a person reports the problem to the police. Cllr Bedford noted up to 40% of reports of domestic violence are by males.

Mr Munday asked how the Commissioner will ensure information is shared between partners. The Commissioner confirmed he is not alone in the pursuit of crime reduction and partnership working is vital. For example, it was a joint initiative between the Commissioner, Hertfordshire County Council and Stevenage Borough Council to fund the women's centre in Stevenage.

Mr Munday queried what systems are in place to give credibility to the accuracy of the figures in the report. The Commissioner advised that the figures are published nationally and are audited by Her Majesty's Inspectorate, which provides validity and a useful comparison with other police forces in the country.

Mr Munday requested that the information is published in a more understandable form for the public. The Commissioner will reflect on this request.

Comments from the Panel

Ms Francis welcomed the Commissioner's commitment to reduce domestic violence and asked whether he would support the Twitter campaign to encourage the abolition of 'page three' models. The Commissioner acknowledged the merits of the campaign but has chosen to not support any campaigns on Twitter, as once one campaign is actively supported by the Commissioner there is a precedent set that must be followed for all campaigns.

Ms Francis noted since the street lights have been switched off some members of the public do not feel safe going outside late at night. The Commissioner advised the lights are only switched off between midnight and 6am and that since the lights have been switched off crime has gone down. Certain locations, such as transport nodes, do not have the lights switched off.

Cllr Brewster observed that a senior police officer and senior probation officer were unaware of the Living Room charity. The Commissioner recognised that this was unfortunate but, broadly speaking, both the police and probation are aware of the work this charity does.

Cllr Bedford welcomed the volunteers that have kept Abbots Langley police station open for longer hours and suggested the scheme could be adopted elsewhere. The Commissioner stated that this is not a panacea for everything and what works in Abbots Langley is not necessarily transferable elsewhere in Hertfordshire. Police station enquiry desks have declined in use by the public. It is better for the police to be on the frontline speaking to people, such as via police surgeries, having a presence at supermarkets or other places the public may gather.

Mr Laidlaw-Dickson raised the issue of collaboration with other police forces and noted Bedfordshire have taken the decision to reduce neighbourhood policing. The Commissioner reaffirmed the focus of his office was on crime reduction in Hertfordshire and possible collaboration with other policing areas had to be right for Hertfordshire.

10 **ANY OTHER BUSINESS**

Cllr Alexander requested that the topic of PCSOs is added to the agenda of the next meeting so councils can plan for the next financial year. The Commissioner advised the monthly meetings with portfolio holders are for this matter and the role of the Commissioner is not operational. It is the Chief Constable who advises how many PCSOs and police officers are required to deliver the Police and Crime Plan.

Ms Francis suggested the localism agenda may be lost with the national probation contracts. The Commissioner confirmed that as the local probation area covers Hertfordshire, Bedfordshire and Cambridgeshire, he is working with the respective police and crime commissioners to influence the national agenda.

11 **DATE OF THE NEXT MEETING**

7pm, Thursday 21 November 2013 - Dacorum Borough Council

AGREED that:

(County Councillor David Andrews pointed out after the meeting that he introduced himself at the previous meeting in his role of county councillor and not as a member of the public)