

Minutes of the meeting of the Essex Police, Fire and Crime Panel, held in Committee Room 1 at County Hall, Chelmsford on Tuesday 21 March 2023

Present:**Councillor**

Keith Barber
Paul Stalker
Ross Playle
Mike Garnett
Ian Shead
Gary Collins
Jude Deakin
Aidan McGurran

Representing

Brentwood Borough Council
Epping Forest District Council
Essex County Council
Harlow District Council
Southend-on-Sea City Council
Thurrock Council
Co-opted Member for Balanced Appointment
Co-opted Member for Balanced Appointment

Co-opted Independent Members

John Gili-Ross (Chairman)
Sheila Murphy

Also in attendance

Sophie Campion	Senior Democratic Services Officer, Secretary to the Panel
Ben-Julian Harrington	Chief Constable, Essex Police
Roger Hirst	Essex Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner (PFCC)
Emma Hunter	Democratic Services Officer
Rick Hylton	Chief Fire Officer/Chief Executive, Essex County Fire and Rescue Service
Janet Perry	Chief Financial Officer, OPFCC
Emma Tombs	Democratic Services Manager

1 Membership, Apologies and Declarations of Interest

The report of the Membership, Apologies and Declarations was received.

1. The membership of the Panel was noted.
2. The following apologies were noted:
 - Cllr Dadds, Basildon Borough Council
 - Cllr Heard, Maldon District Council
 - Cllr Lilley, Colchester City Council
 - Cllr McWilliams, Tendring District Council
 - Cllr Ricci, Braintree District Council
 - Cllr Savage, Castle Point Borough Council
 - Cllr Sutton, Uttlesford District Council
3. There were no declarations of interest made.

2 Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on 7 February 2023 were approved as a correct record, subject to minor amendments as set out below and signed by the Chairman.

- Amend the attendance to record that Annette Chan, Debbie Martin and Dawn Walters were employees of Essex Police rather than the OPFCC as stated.

3 Questions to the Chairman from members of the Public

There were none.

4 Police and Crime Plan Performance Measures – Quarter 2 2022/23

The Panel received report EPFCP/03/23 which provided an overview of Essex Police's progress in delivering the priorities set out in the Police and Crime Plan, based on data and other information to the end of September 2022.

The Chairman explained that this was the regular performance report to the Panel which had been delayed due to other reports to the Panel taking priority at recent meetings.

The Commissioner introduced the report and advised that in future these reports would be set out differently in response to Panel feedback. He brought the Panel's attention to a national review of Community Safety Partnerships (CSPs) but explained that in Essex the model was strong and contributed to a visible presence. The Commissioner highlighted some good areas of work such as Southend becoming the first policing team to use 'Open Gates' a weapons searching system and the success of the North Domestic Abuse Problem Solving Team. He also drew attention to some continued areas of focus such as the solved rate for sexual offences, the number of people killed and seriously injured on the roads and call answering times.

During the discussion, the Panel asked questions and sought clarification on the following issues:

- It was explained that when attending incidents such as domestic abuse incidents the focus would be on assessing the situation and evidence, threat, harm and risk, collecting evidence and making arrests to a perpetrator where there is evidence to suggest an offence has been committed.
- Operations relating to Priority 4 - Reducing violence against women and girls were explained to the Panel and it was confirmed that these were used across all adult sexual abuse and investigation teams.
- It was confirmed that there was a proposal for the Section 28 special measure to allow pre-recorded cross examination of intimidated victims of sexual and modern slavery offences, to also be used for some domestic abuse cases. There would be a resourcing and training challenge as it

was a skilled job, but it would be welcomed. There was already a good video interviewing system in place. There were also other special measures for giving evidence already in existence.

- The 'Street Safe' App was an important tool to help women and girls to be safe. It was publicly accessible on the website but the Commissioner acknowledged that perhaps more could be done to promote it. It allowed people to inform the police anonymously of specific locations where they felt unsafe. That would be fed back to the CSP to look at plans to address it. Where there were lots of reports in a location a Safer Streets bid could be looked at. It could also feed into project Minerva where data was collected for a targeted response. It was noted that there had been a significant increase in the use of the App in the last quarter.
- It was explained that with regard to Priority 9 - Improving safety on our roads, the general trend was moving in the right direction but not at a fast enough pace. The work and role of community Speed Watch groups was acknowledged and well supported. It was not an enforcement tool, rather it was an education tool to remind drivers of risk spots.
- The Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) were defined in the Police and Crime Plan which the Panel had provided input to previously. In its current format the report didn't give a sense of progress, however in future reports a sub-set of the KPIs would be used for reporting with trend analysis and feedback could be given.
- With regard to victims of modern slavery, it was confirmed that Essex Police would treat them as victims of crime however they had come to be in the country.
- The 'Street Weeks' events were being carried out across the county and delivered face-to-face community engagement to help residents understand how everyone can work together for the safety of an area, particularly focused on reducing neighbourhood crime and anti-social behaviour. Almost every area of the County had one planned.
- The 'Open Gates' weapons searching system had been successful in Southend and had been co-funded with the CSP. There was now a unit which could be deployed around the county. There were no plans for complete coverage across the county currently as there were cost implications. It was an important tool but still required intelligence and police officers to use their judgement and powers.
- Work was being done to map and plot organised crime groups to work out where they operated from. There was a tasking co-ordination process across the county at different levels and through the Essex and Kent Serious Crime Directorate and Eastern Region Special Operations Unit. The Commissioner received regular reports from Essex and Kent and the regional unit to understand successes and challenges.
- The Domestic Violence Disclosure Scheme was implemented in 2014. This was being taken online to make it more accessible. The investment from prevention work in this area was proving successful. There was beginning to be a reduction in the number of recorded domestic abuse crime and there were more prosecutions.

Following suggestions from the Panel, the Commissioner agreed to give further consideration to the following issues:

- Ways to improve the publicity of the 'Street Safe' App.
- Looking into why Basildon was not included in the 'Street Weeks' plans.
- It was suggested that there was more engagement with District and Borough Councillors to increase awareness of initiatives such as 'Street Weeks'.
- Issues raised regarding the implications of the Illegal Migration Bill on support and protections for victims of modern slavery.

Resolved:

That the Panel received and noted the report.

5 Fire and Rescue Plan Performance Measures – Quarter 2 2022/23

The Panel received report EPFCP/04/23 which provided an overview of the Essex County Fire and Rescue Service's progress in delivering the priorities set out in the Fire and Rescue Plan 2020 – 2024 during Quarter 2 of 2022/23.

The Commissioner introduced the report and drew the Panel's attention to the fact that it had been a sustained busy period due to the heatwave in the summer but had not resulted in the need to declare a major incident. There had also been an increase in the provision of Special Services. The Commissioner highlighted the increased number of Home Fire Safety Visits that had taken place despite the team having to go into business continuity measures due to loss of staff. He also highlighted the small steady increases in the diversity of the workforce.

Some areas of continued focus included station coverage and attendance times. The number of audits completed under the Risk based Inspection programme was still off target.

The Chairman thanked and paid tribute to the Fire and Rescue Service on behalf of the Panel for its work during the difficult circumstances of the heatwave period.

During the discussion, the Panel asked questions and sought clarification on the following issues:

- It was noted that the percentage of incidents attended within 15 minutes had dropped to 77% in quarter 2. It was explained that this was because of the difficulties of the summer period, including field fires in hard to reach places, pumps being in use and pumps having to come from further distances. It was noted that it had improved to 83% in quarter 3.
- With regard to on-call recruitment it was explained that the nature of the role was that people had other employment and whilst during Covid there had been good availability, since then people had returned to their primary employment and committed more time to that and there had been an increase in demand for other employment. The turnover was therefore currently higher.

- In terms of sickness it was reported that staff with Covid were still asked to stay at home and there had been a recent surge in Covid related sickness contributing to the increase in sickness reported. It was explained that there were various reasons for longer-term sickness including long Covid, musculo-skeletal injuries and mental health reasons, however the numbers had fallen in quarter 3. The Service supported people through these periods and to return to work wherever possible but there were options for ill health retirement where required.
- The implications of the offer for the pay settlement were outlined. The pay settlement would be well over what had been budgeted for. This could be accommodated through the use of reserves for this year, but a consequence due to affordability was that there would need to be negotiations around improving productivity through changes to flexible working practices.
- Significant progress had been made with regard to the HMICFRS report. Raising protection activity was still an area of focus but was moving in the right direction but had not yet been closed out. The cause for concern around the culture of the organisation had now been closed out. The recommendations had been embedded within the plans for the year. There was work ongoing to prioritise in order to implement the actions that provided the most value first. Some actions for various reasons would take longer to embed but all were in train. Inspection officers were now trained and in place for the revised Risk Based Inspection Programme taking a holistic approach to compliance and ensuring there was capacity enforce as well as inspect.
- It was explained that performance against the HMICFRS recommendations was monitored by the Commissioner at the Performance and Resources Board and the reports were published and could be viewed on the Commissioner's website.
- In terms of how many staff declare an identity for the data regarding diversity within the workforce, it was explained that there was an improvement. There was consistently 1 in 5 applicants that were female getting through the recruitment process and course.

Resolved:

That the Panel received and noted the report.

6 Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner's Decisions Reports

The Panel received and raised questions on report EPFCP/05/23 which provided information about financial and strategic decisions made by the PFCC.

The Panel sought further clarification on the following decisions:

Appendix A – Police Decisions

- Ref 169-22 - Delayed Notice – Statement of Accounts for the year ended 31.03.2022

Appendix B – Fire and Rescue Decisions

- Ref 044-22 - Breathing Apparatus Instructors
- Ref 059-22 - Purchase of fleet

Resolved:

That the Panel received and noted the report.

7 The Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner to update the Panel on any ongoing issues

The Commissioner provided the Panel with a verbal update on ongoing issues:

- Fire and Rescue Service pay settlement
- Updated Strategic Policing Requirement
- Launch of Essex Rural Crime Strategy
- Annual Youth Event
- Consultation on the revised Policing Code of Ethics
- Outcomes from the report on the Metropolitan Police

Resolved:

That the verbal report was noted.

8 Annual Complaints Report 2021-22

The Panel received report EPFCP/06/23 which provided the Essex Police, Fire and Crime Panel (PFCP) with an update on the handling of complaints made against the Essex Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner (PFCC) during the period 1 October 2021 to 30 September 2022.

Resolved:

That the report was noted.

9 Report of the Ethics and Integrity Sub-Committee

The Panel received report EPFCP/07/23 providing the minutes from the Ethics and Integrity Sub-Committee meeting held on 24 November 2022.

Resolved:

That the minutes were noted.

10 Forward Work Plan

The Panel received report EPFCP/08/23 setting out the planned business of the Panel.

Resolved:

1. That the item relating to performance against attendance targets to incidents graded as 3 – Priority, under the Essex Police’s Command and Control of Incidents Policy and how that fits with achieving the priorities in the Police and Crime Plan, be removed from the Forward Work Plan.
2. That the item on performance against Priority 1 – More Local, Visible and Accessible Policing from the Police and Crime Plan as extended to 2021, be concluded and removed from the Forward Work Plan.
3. That the Panel noted the Forward Work Plan.

11 National Association of Police, Fire and Crime Panels Update

The Panel received a verbal update from the Chairman of the Panel which included an update on the Annual meeting of the National Association of Police, Fire and Crime Panels.

The Chairman updated the Panel on a survey which had been carried out by the NAPFCP of its members regarding work practices. The report on the results of that survey would be shared with all Panels.

The Chairman also advised the Panel that he had attended a workshop as part of one of the Home Office policy recommendations about Police & Crime Panels (PCPs) that arose from the Police and Crime Commissioner (PCC) Review, around the support provided to Panels.

Resolved:

That the verbal update was noted.

12 Date of Next Meeting

The Panel noted that the next meeting would take place on Thursday 15 June 2023 at 2:00pm.

The Chairman noted that for some Members of the Panel this would be their last Panel meeting due to not standing in the local elections in May 2023. The Chairman thanked those Members for their hard work and contributions to the work of the Panel.

There being no urgent business, the meeting closed at 4:03pm.