

**MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE ESSEX POLICE AND CRIME PANEL
HELD AT COUNTY HALL, CHELMSFORD, ON 29 JANUARY 2014**

Present:

Councillor

Malcolm Buckley
Graham Butland
Godfrey Isaacs
Bob Shepherd
Tim Young
Gary Waller
John Jowers
Mike Danvers
Stephen Savage
Jo McPherson
Lynda McWilliams
Angie Gaywood
Robert Chambers
John Gili-Ross
Kay Odysseos

Representing

Basildon Borough Council
Braintree District Council
Castle Point Borough Council
Chelmsford City Council
Colchester Borough Council
Epping Forest District Council
Essex County Council (Chairman)
Harlow District Council
Maldon District Council
Rochford District Council
Tendring District Council
Thurrock Borough Council
Uttlesford District Council
Independent Member
Independent Member

Apologies for Absence

Chris Hossack	Brentwood Borough Council
Tony Cox	Southend Borough Council
Paul Sztumpf with Mike Danvers as his substitute	Harlow District Council
Penny Channer with Stephen Savage as her substitute	Maldon District Council
Paul Honeywood with Lynda McWilliams as his substitute	Tendring District Council
Ann Haigh	Co-opted Member

The following Officers were in attendance throughout the meeting:

Colin Ismay, Governance Team Manager, Essex County Council, Secretary to the meeting

Jane Gardner, Head of Commissioning Growing Essex Communities, Essex County Council

Nick Alston, the Essex Police and Crime Commissioner, and Lindsay Whitehouse, Deputy Commissioner, were in attendance throughout supported by the following officers:

Susannah Hancock, Executive Director

Charles Garbett, Treasurer

1. Minutes

Subject in line 3 of minute 3. (Declarations of Interest) to the substitution of the words "Police and Crime Commissioner's New Initiative Fund" for the Words

“Community Safety”, the minutes of the meeting held on 12 December 2013 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

In response to a comment made by Councillor Savage with regard to minute 4 (Questions to the Chairman from Members of the Public) and the response he had received to his question, the Chairman clarified that the item provided for asking questions of the Chairman and therefore he had responded. He added that the Kent and Essex Inshore Fisheries and Conservation Authority was interested in the cross warranting of its vessel for involvement in Policing activity.

2. Declarations of Interest

Councillors Jowers and McPherson declared a personal interest as members of Safer Essex. Councillors Isaacs, McWilliams and Waller declared a personal interest as members of Safer Essex and Chairman of the local Community Safety Partnership. Councillor McPherson also declared a personal interest as being employed by a recipient of a Police and Crime Commissioner’s New Initiative Fund grant.

3. Actions arising from the last meeting

The Panel received report EPCP/023/13 by the Secretary to the Panel highlighting the matters raised during the previous meeting that required further action and indicating the action taken.

In response to a question from Councillor McPherson in relation to the Domestic Violence pilot in Rochford Schools, the Commissioner explained that a meeting had been arranged with Essex County Council for two weeks’ time to consider crime prevention initiatives in schools.

4. The Proposed Police Precept for 2014/15

The Panel considered report (EPCP/024)/14) by the Secretary to the Panel setting out the arrangements for the Panel to deal with the Commissioner’s proposed precept. The Commissioner’s proposals were attached to the report. The Commissioner’s report detailed the revenue and capital budget strategy which was intended to support Essex Police in achieving the best policing services for the people of Essex within available resources and also support the Commissioner to commission crime reduction and community safety services.

The loss of Central Government grant from 2013/14 to 2014/15 is significant at 4.8%, equivalent to £8.4m and is indicatively equivalent to 165 police officers. The Commissioner and Chief Constable will however ensure that wherever possible and appropriate, policing numbers are protected. Savings required for a balanced budget are £8.7m during 2014/15, with an additional £7.9m during 2015/16 and £12.2m during 2016/17. Total recurring savings required by 2016/17 are £28.8m.

The Commissioner proposed a precept increase of just under £5 a year (3.5%) to mitigate the reduction in Central Government funding. This sum would generate funds equivalent to the cost of 57 police officers.

In order to ensure sound financial management, the Commissioner needs to address some difficult legacy issues. This will help to ensure longer term stability and sustainable use of resources. As a result he proposed the following:

- i) reducing the pension deficit period for the LGPS from 27 years to 20 years - increasing the employer contributions by £420,000 per year will reduce risk and save council tax payers a net £1.9m in the long term;
- ii) increasing the repayments for internal borrowing by £0.5m per year will reduce the remaining repayment period from approximately 18 years to 9 years on assets that are, for the most part, no longer used and will also increase the proportion of reserves that are cash backed thus reducing the risk of expensive short term borrowing.

The Commissioner is investing £250,000 to facilitate the development and delivery of estates and IT strategies. Both of these are essential to ensure the effective and sustainable use of assets. These assets will be key enablers for delivering efficient policing in Essex in the interests of citizens and victims.

The Commissioner remains committed to supporting community safety partnerships through his on-going grants and commissioning programme. Through strategic collaboration with partners and the wider community the Commissioner will continue to support initiatives to deliver on the outcomes set out in the Police and Crime Plan.

Essex has one of the lowest precepts in the country which, for a large police force area with close proximity to London and associated crime types, brings with it some significant challenges. Increasing the precept by 3.5% would reduce the risks to the effective delivery of policing services.

The Revenue Budget strategy is:

- i) to maintain a balanced budget over the three-year life of the 2014/15 to 2016/17 Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) by achieving a profile of savings reaching a total of £28.8m per year by 2016/17;
- ii) to increase the precept for 2014/15 by the maximum permitted by the Government before a referendum is triggered;
- iii) to implement a new basis for commissioning of crime reduction initiatives ensuring that funding is clearly linked to outcomes in the Police and Crime Plan; and
- iv) to maintain as a minimum sufficient reserves to meet working capital needs, essential investment and unforeseen events (the significant demand on reserves over the next three years means that it is essential that a firm grip on finances is maintained).

The Commissioner's capital expenditure programme will be financed from accumulated capital reserves, new capital receipts and through Central Government support. The Capital Expenditure strategy is:

- i) to advance the work on the capital strategies for the estate, IT and fleet through investment in strategic options that define the capital investment that would best meet operational policing and community requirements;
- ii) to present to the Panel's autumn meeting a revised capital programme to reflect the new capital strategies;
- iii) to maximise capital resources from capital receipts and grants to fund both the current and emerging Capital Programme.

The Commissioner proposed to increase the precept (the policing part of the council tax) in 2014/15 to the maximum permitted by the Government before a referendum is triggered. He proposed a precept increase of 3.5%, equivalent to an increase of £4.95 a year from £141.48 to £146.43 for a Band D property, thus raising £2.9m of additional council tax receipts.

The Commissioner gave an overview of his report and explained that he had made his proposal on the basis that the Government had not yet announced a cap on Police Budgets or any freedom for those Forces at the bottom of the precepting scale. He had been arguing for some flexibility and consequently had been working on that assumption. From the public meetings he has held across the County he has picked up the public's concerns about reductions in the numbers of police officers and PCSOs.

After a year in Office he had a better understanding of the Police: the indicators show that Essex is one of the least well-funded Forces and yet features in the top four of most of the efficiency measures. The only control he has is over the setting of the precept. He also has to think about the long-term position of the Police. He appreciated the hardship faced by many of the residents of Essex but believed that people were prepared to pay to protect the levels of policing in the County. He added that Sussex and Kent are proposing to take a similar line.

His aim was to stabilise the cuts to services. He wanted to ensure that the Police managed the budget as best they can: he felt that this was already good but wanted to see further improvement. In terms of adjustments to the budget he intended to scale back the new initiatives fund but will continue with the community initiatives fund. There needed to be a focus on reducing demand for services.

The following points were made during the ensuing debate.

- In response to a question from Councillor Chambers the Commissioner gave examples of what he meant by reducing demand involving partnership working with the Health Service so that victims of domestic abuse seek help at an earlier stage and so reduce demand on the Police. Also in terms of crime prevention working with Mental Health patients to ensure they are dealt with by the Health Service rather than the Police. Councillor Chambers responded that it was important for the Commissioner to get his message across to the public so that they understand what is meant. The Commissioner agreed it was about showing that crime is falling but that people should still be reporting incidents of crime.

- Councillor Butland asked the Commissioner if he understood any better the link between the Police budget and what is being delivered. The Commissioner presented budget information in terms of numbers of police officers but what did it equate to in terms of impact on crime. Strategically, where did the Commissioner want to be and where did he want to be on the efficiency scale? What is the worst thing that could happen if he did not get the increase he has proposed? The Commissioner explained that he used Police Officer numbers as a helpful proxy for percentages and numbers. He responded that the worst thing that could happen is that the Chief Constable takes his eye off the ball and this impacts adversely on achieving value for money. He went on to say that Essex Police is not as good at crime reduction as some other forces and that it is still difficult to make the correlation between the budget and what is delivered. He was a bit more confident after a year in Office but needed to secure greater efficiencies. His Office was looking at the matter closely and working with Essex Police to improve financial oversight and monitoring. He felt that the Force needed to be more business oriented.
- Councillor Waller agreed that the majority of the public would be willing to pay to maintain policing but many would want to see more rural policing. Epping Forest District Council has held the Council Tax at the same level for five years so are not happy about the possibility of an increase in the Police precept arguing that there is always an opportunity to make efficiency savings. He therefore asked the Commissioner to give examples of efficiencies already being pursued and of any that have been rejected. The Commissioner cited the following examples:
 - collaborations with Kent Police
 - joint savings with Kent across support services
 - the civilianisation of some police posts
 - looking at the effectiveness of the police fleet and workshops
 - IT solutions including looking at joint technologies with Kent.The Commissioner undertook to circulate a note of efficiencies. He agreed that everything should be looked at and he was currently in discussion with the Fire Service.
- Councillor Buckley commented that he had some sympathy with the views expressed by Councillor Butland. He agreed to the increase last year so that the Commissioner could make a difference; however, a further increase above inflation is difficult to agree. It is better to have the lowest precept and the most efficient service. He asked the Commissioner why he had rejected holding the precept at the same level; for instance it was possible to work with other authorities and plan for joint Chief Constables and joint Commissioners. There needed to be substantially more police officers to justify the increase proposed. The Commissioner responded that he would still have to make the savings and he needed to take a long-term view. He had an open mind about collaboration with other forces. In response to a further question from Councillor Buckley concerning future increases in precept, the Commissioner said he would address it on a year by year basis.
- Councillor Gaywood commented that the Commissioner had made an eloquent case for an increase in the precept and agreed that the numbers of police officers are important to the public; however, the Chief Constable had taken a decision not to match fund PCSOs with local authorities and under

spending on officers in this year's budget had been top-sliced for other purposes. There had also been the over spend on Athena. The Commissioner responded that balancing recruitment against the need to make savings in the future had led to the under spend. He was planning a small reduction in new initiatives funding but no reductions in funding to Community Safety Partnerships. In terms of the Independent Domestic Violence Advocate Service the Commissioner said his Office was working with partners to develop a joint approach to commissioning greater provision in this important area.

- Councillor Danvers considered that the Commissioner's proposals were reasonable: there would still be the need for budget cuts and 10p a week was fair.
- Kay Odysseos considered that selling the need for an increase to the public when not actually in terms of officers was difficult. She asked the Commissioner what was his strategy for communicating the increase. The Commissioner responded that he would try to be as open as possible. He appreciated that he needed to do better in terms of engaging with the public and had appointed a new Head of Engagement. He stated that the Chief Constable had devoted a lot of thought to it. Kay asked that the Commissioner bring a draft engagement strategy to a future meeting of the Panel.
- Councillor Young agreed with much of what Councillor Danvers had said. There had been a lot of first time Council Tax payers last year. The Commissioner had made his case for the increase. He considered it was a false economy by the Government to cut the Police Grant. Communication of the issue was important. Someone has to pay for an efficient service. The Commissioner responded that he hoped Essex would take responsibility for its Police force.
- The Chairman commented that local authorities themselves were under huge pressure. Having said that it is not good to be at the bottom of the precept table it is better to be the median. He believed that the Commissioner's case was well made and there was nowhere else for him to go. Also there had been no adverse reaction from the public to last year's increase.
- John Gili-Ross clarified the savings to be made by reducing the longevity of the pension deficit period. In relation to the Chief Constable's EVOLVE programme he made the point that making changes needed to be considered carefully as change of itself can be expensive. The Commissioner responded that this was a matter for the Chief Constable to deal with.
- In response to an enquiry from Councillor Buckley with regard to the generation of capital receipts and the low usage of some of the Estate, the Commissioner explained that there were some unused buildings and although good progress was being made in dealing with disposals the Commissioner would like to see more progress. The Treasurer pointed out that Table 8 on Forecast Capital Receipts on page 34 of the Agenda included precise figures as the Commissioner was looking to generate those receipts. Councillor Buckley pointed out that if buildings were only in part-time use, other users could be found and Councillor McPherson made the point that even if a building was not in use there was still a cost involved.

- In response to a question from Councillor Waller with regard to the increase in the budgeted cost of retirement of Police Officers through ill-health and injury, the Commissioner undertook to provide a written explanation.

The Chairman explained the options available to the Panel in relation to the proposed precept. In response to a question from Councillor Butland, the commissioner explained that it was not his intention to take his precept increase to a referendum as it was too expensive.

Having considered the report on the precept, listened to the Commissioner's justification of the need for an increase and had the opportunity to hold him to account for his proposal, the Panel

Decided:

- (1) That, on the understanding that the Secretary of State did not apply a cap to the level of increase in Police precepts, the Panel was satisfied with the Commissioner's proposed increase in the Police precept for 2014/15 of 3.5%.
- (2) That, in the event that the Commissioner's budget proposals were impacted by the subsequent application of a cap to the level of increase in Police precepts the Commissioner should report back to a further meeting to present the Panel with his revised proposals.

Councillors Buckley, Butland and Gaywood requested that their names be recorded as having voted against.

5. Forward Look

The Panel considered a report (EPCP/025/14) by the Secretary to the Panel concerning the planning of the Panel's business.

The Panel agreed the business proposed for the meetings currently scheduled subject to a number of additions made during the meeting relating to:

- The Commissioner's public engagement strategy
- Neighbourhood policing (to be covered by the Chief Constable at the February meeting)
- Public engagement with the Panel
- Safeguarding issues

6. Update on On-going Issues

The Commissioner provided the Panel with a brief update on the following:

- The recruitment of Specials and the deployment of Rural Specials.
- His decision not to go ahead with the withdrawal from payment to the districts of the Local Tax Support. The results will be reviewed during the year. The decision was welcomed by the Panel.

- Progress on the major commissioning project being undertaken by his Office for Victims Services.
- Publicity for the Commissioner's public meetings: dates are all on the Commissioner's website. He referred to the next session with the Chief Constable to be held in Chelmsford on Thursday, 27 February when the emphasis will be on local policing. The Commissioner encouraged members of the Panel to attend.
- The following items on which he is focusing attention:
 - The reopening of roads after accident investigations
 - Education
 - Mental Health
 - Crime data.
- In response to a question from the Panel, the Commissioner undertook to circulate information regarding the lobbying policy of the Association of Police and Crime Commissioners.
- He gave an update on progress on the Athena project which is for a case management system provided by Northgate.

Chairman
20 February 2014