

MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE ESSEX POLICE AND CRIME PANEL HELD AT COUNTY HALL, CHELMSFORD, ON THURSDAY 18 FEBRUARY 2016

Present:

Councillor

Wendy Schmitt
Godfrey Isaacs
Bob Shepherd
Tim Young
Gary Waller
John Jowers
Tony Durcan
Penny Channer
Jo McPherson
Lynda McWilliams
John Gili-Ross
Kay Odysseos

Representing

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
Independent Member
Independent Member

Apologies for Absence

Tony Hedley	Basildon Borough Council
William Russell	Brentwood Borough Council
Ian Gilbert	Southend Borough Council
Jane Potheary and her substitute	Thurrock Borough Council
Gerard Rice	
Jim Gordon	Uttlesford District Council

County Councillors Michael Mackrory and Stephen Robinson, and Maldon District Councillor Stephen Savage, were also in attendance.

The following officers were in attendance throughout the meeting:

Anna Hook, Commissioning Support Manager
Colin Ismay, Council and Member Support Manager, Essex County Council,
Secretary to the Panel
Fiona Lancaster, Committee Officer, Essex County Council

Nick Alston, the Essex Police and Crime Commissioner, and Lindsay Whitehouse, Deputy Commissioner, were in attendance throughout and supported by Susannah Hancock, Chief Executive.

1. Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on 29 January 2016 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

2. Declarations of Interest

Councillor J Jowers declared a personal interest as a member of the Essex Fire Authority (minute 4 below refers).

Councillors G Isaacs, L McWilliams, and G Waller declared a personal interest as members of their local Community Safety Partnerships (CSPs) (minute 4 below refers).

Councillor G Isaacs also declared a personal interest as an NHS employee (minute 4 below refers).

3. Questions to the Chairman from Members of the Public

From Councillor Stephen Robinson

Councillor Robinson asked for comments on whether local resident protests would not be policed as a result of the reduction in police officer numbers and the impact on the Police Force's ability to close roads.

As Councillor Robinson's comments related to operational matters the Commissioner undertook to feed back the questions to the Chief Constable who would be asked to provide a response.

From Councillor Michael Mackrory

Councillor Mackrory asked for comments on how the Police Force was dealing with the increase in knife crime incidents in Chelmsford. The Chairman responded that this question would be addressed as part of item 5 (End of term report by the Commissioner) on the agenda.

4. End of term report by the Commissioner

The Panel considered report EPCP/04/16 by the Commissioner which provided a summary of the key issues, challenges and achievements that had taken place since the Commissioner took up office in November 2012.

In presenting his report, the Commissioner reported that he had attended an Essex Fire Authority meeting on 17 February to talk about future working/collaboration opportunities between the Police and Fire Services in the light of the recent Government announcement to expand the role of the Police and Crime Commissioners.

The Commissioner highlighted the results of Essex Police's PEEL (police effectiveness, efficiency and legitimacy) inspection which had been published earlier in the day, and indicated his agreement with the HMIC Effectiveness judgement that "Essex Police requires improvement at keeping people safe and reducing crime".

With the resources currently available, it was not possible to operate a model of "bobbies on the beat" which HMIC was looking for. The force was aware of the danger of becoming isolated from communities, but the Commissioner reminded the Panel about the changing nature of crime and the challenges presented by the changes within communities as a result of the growing movement of individuals coming into the County from London and Europe.

The following points were made during the ensuing discussion.

- The need for sustaining challenge from the incoming Commissioner to ensure that improvements in relation to Essex Police culture, staff skills and training were kept on track.
- Members welcomed the launch of a new re-offending programme designed to target high risk offenders and change their criminal behaviours. They also noted the role of the Reducing Re-offending Board with its links across all offender pathways and review of Out of Court disposals, encouraging Essex Police to focus more on preventative and restorative justice with other partners.
- The Commissioner commented that the biggest frustration during his term of office had been in relation to Essex Police's failure adequately to explain and communicate with local representatives and communities. This remained an area for improvement in order to build public satisfaction with the Force.
- The Panel noted the complexities around knife crime and its links to London-based drug gangs using 'local' vulnerable contacts, particularly in South Essex. Victims of crime were often not local to the areas where incidents occurred, but there was a danger of a 'rippling' effect from these leading to more individuals carrying knives. Essex Police need to analyse the data to understand the gang-related activity and how it should adjust force priorities to focus on this area. Members welcomed the roll out of a new project to all secondary school children in Chelmsford regarding knife crime.

The Commissioner undertook to talk to Councillor Tim Young, outside of the meeting, regarding issues local to Colchester.

- The Deputy Commissioner reported on the success of the Community Development Safety Fund and its impact. In the past year, approximately £416k had been awarded across 44 projects. Details of the projects could be found on the Commissioner's website.
- The relationship with the force's professional standards and its success as a dip test method of scrutiny on complaints.
- Members expressed their gratitude for the Commissioner's support for Community Safety Partnerships (CSPs).
- The opportunities available with Community Safety hubs.
- More details on hidden harm victims were sought. Members were reminded that the Chief Constable had undertaken a national lead role on digital investigation and intelligence.

- Some Panel Members expressed concern regarding the likely change of emphasis on policing with the incoming Commissioner as all Essex candidates had stated that they intended to put more “bobbies on the beat”.
- The Commissioner commented that he had been surprised and disappointed to read in the HMIC report that during the summer of 2015, neighbourhood policing was suspended in the North of the County for six weeks. He had not been informed of this by Essex Chief Officers. His understanding was that the force had focused on the STORM list – the list of unresolved open incidents waiting for a response – and some staff had been redeployed to back office to help reduce the high number of incidents awaiting action.

The Commissioner informed the Panel that he had discussed the matter with the Chief Constable and highlighted the public frustration in relation to the way in which District Commanders were failing to communicate in an open and transparent way with local residents.

The Panel noted that the Commissioner had also been surprised by the HMIC comments made in relation to the Essex gang strategy, which showed that the force had not consulted with partners at an early stage. This had led to an adverse reaction and indicated that the force needed to do more work to foster good relations with its partners.

- Members indicated that they would be interested to hear the Chief Constable’s reaction to the HMIC report.
- The Commissioner encouraged Members to invite District Commanders to local meetings to improve upon the current level of engagement.
- The need to focus on how to deal with individuals with mental health issues, and avoid the overuse of Tasers. Members noted the introduction of a new mental health hub in Tendring which was working to help those in crisis and reduce pressure on the police.
- In response to a question on which area the Commissioner may have acted differently, the Commissioner indicated that he would have liked to have spent more time on criminal justice work to develop a more efficient victim-focused justice system for Essex. Members noted the opportunity for the incoming Commissioner to get involved in this area.
- The Commissioner acknowledged that the Government legislation regarding the setting up of the Panel had been inadequate and that it had limited sanctions to hold him to account. He expressed the view that he was keen for the Panel to have more powers and to promote its role to the public. More challenge from Members on police performance and accessibility, and on the Commissioner’s scrutiny programme for the next year, was recommended.

- Susannah Hancock, Chief Executive, explained that with the potential changes coming in relating to complaints handling legislation and greater collaboration with the Essex Fire Authority there was a possibility that the Panel could see its role being further developed. She also commented that in her view there was a good level of challenge and support from the Panel, and she valued the constructive relationship.

The Chairman, on behalf of the Panel Members, warmly congratulated and thanked the Commissioner on his successful term of office, and in particular, for being so visible, accessible and approachable in his role.

5. Update on On-going Issues

The Commissioner informed the Panel that the high murder rate in the County had not slowed down and was being discussed by Essex Chief Officers.

6. Date of Next Meeting

The Panel noted that the next meeting would take place at 2.30 pm on Thursday 26 May 2016, in Committee Room 1, County Hall, and that this would be preceded by a private pre-meeting starting at 1.45 pm.

Chairman
26 May 2016