

MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE ESSEX POLICE AND CRIME PANEL HELD AT COUNTY HALL, CHELMSFORD, ON 29 JANUARY 2015

Present:

Councillor

Tony Hedley
Graham Butland
Godfrey Isaacs
Bob Shepherd
Tim Young
Gary Waller
John Jowers
Mike Danvers
Penny Channer
Jo McPherson
Mike Assenheim
Lynda McWilliams
Phil Smith
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 (Vice-Chairman)
Southend Borough Council
Tendring District Council
Thurrock Borough Council
Uttlesford District Council
Independent Member
Independent Member

Apologies for Absence

John Newberry Brentwood Borough Council
Mick Page with Lynda Tendring District Council
McWilliams as his
substitute

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:

Jane Gardner, Head of Commissioning Growing Essex Communities
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 supported by the following officers:
Susannah Hancock, Chief Executive
Charles Garbett, Treasurer

The Chairman encouraged Panel Members to arrange a substitute when they were unable to attend meetings.

1. Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on 27 November 2014 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

2. Declarations of Interest

The Chairman reminded Panel members to declare any interests as appropriate throughout the meeting.

3. Questions to the Chairman from Members of the Public

From Councillor Stephen Savage

In response to a question from Councillor Savage with regard to report CPCP/03/15, page 35, appendix C, Fleet replacement programme, the Treasurer undertook to provide further information regarding Essex Police Fleet sales and capitalisation.

From Councillor Stephen Robinson

Councillor Robinson explained that he had been contacted by relatives and friends of Ashley Woolley, who had been fatally stabbed in Oaklands Park Chelmsford, to ask the Commissioner to comment on what he was doing to reduce knife crime in Essex and what initiatives were underway in schools.

The Commissioner remains concerned about knife crime and the numbers carrying knives, particularly in Colchester and Tendring, where over 400 knives had been handed in at the knife amnesty bins in Tendring. District Commanders were currently looking at the right areas to locate amnesty bins across the County, which were provided free of charge.

The Commissioner mentioned the efforts of Caroline Shearer, founder of Only Cowards Carry, to make young people aware of the effects of knife crime and to have this put on the national curriculum. He also reported that there were knife programmes across Essex to supplement school police officer work. In terms of overall numbers the incidents of knife crime were modest in scale. There needed to be a separation of knife crime associated with drugs and gangs.

In response to a question from Councillor Robinson regarding the future of Melbourne Police Station in Chelmsford, the Commissioner indicated that although he was pre-disposed to help communities he was having to reconfigure the Estate and needed to maximise the disposal value of the assets.

Councillor Mackrory reported on concerns arising from his local Neighbourhood Watch regarding drugs being used openly in the Springfield area of Chelmsford, and the apparent lack of response due to the lack of PCSOs. As his comments related to operational matters the Commissioner undertook to feed back the concerns to the District Commander.

4. Actions arising from the last meeting

The Panel received report EPCP/01/15 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 comment from Kay Odysseos regarding the statistical information circulated out of meeting on the number of residents accessing the

Commissioner's website, the Chief Executive of the Commissioner's Office undertook to provide greater detail on what information is accessed by residents.

5. Membership

The Panel received report EPCP/02/15 by the Secretary to the Panel in response to its request made at the last meeting for a report on membership following the resignation of Ann Haigh as a co-opted member.

The Panel agreed that no further action would be taken at this stage as a review of membership would be required at the next meeting after the May elections.

6. The proposed Police Precept for 2015/16

The Panel considered report EPCP/03/15 and accompanying appendices by the Commissioner setting out the proposed precept for 2015/16.

The following points were made during the ensuing discussion.

- Some Panel members expressed disappointment regarding the lack of detail and convincing argument contained within the proposals. There was also concern that the report did not give a comprehensive picture of the findings of Her Majesty's Inspector of Constabulary (HMIC) value for money report by only concentrating on the positive aspects. The Commissioner responded that a full account of the HMC report had been given. He also highlighted that the Police Accounts did not provide the complexity of detail of those of a district or the County Council. Budget spend is focused very much on police officers, vehicles and buildings. It does not involve project and programme costs as a local authority budget might. Further work is being done to achieve a better understanding of the impact of changes in expenditure on Essex Police performance. Members wanted to understand how the Chief Constable approaches budget setting, including how he determines the numbers and type of staff needed, taking into account the static level of crime but changing crime trends.
- The Commissioner gave an explanation of what is meant by police officers being placed on restricted duty. The high figures across the County were disappointing to him, but were being reviewed regularly. The Commissioner undertook to provide the Panel with more information and implications of officers on restricted duties.
- Members expressed concern regarding perceived high level of staffing costs identified by HMIC, with Essex having the top police officer costs per full time equivalent (FTE). The Commissioner undertook to provide a detailed response on the reasons for this.
- The Treasurer explained the proposed levels of reserves would ensure there were sufficient funds available for liquidity purposes and to avoid short-term borrowing. A contingency element of £4m was included for

unplanned events. The Panel noted that the return on reserves was just below 1%.

- The Commissioner confirmed that perceived terrorism protection was included in the budget, and that Essex had a specialist fire arms resource. Counter terrorist activity was funded nationally.
- The Panel received a tabled paper from the Commissioner providing the definition of operational frontline roles.
- The new Airwave radio system was due to be rolled out in Essex in 2016/17 and £5m had been allocated to replace equipment. Members noted the high level of risk associated with the project and in particular, on the anticipated number of contracts for tender. The Commissioner undertook to provide more information on "Airwave".
- The Commissioner reported that an agreed five week slippage on the roll out of Athena had occurred before the Christmas holiday as it had been necessary to change the interface with the police national computer. All seven police forces involved with the project had agreed the delay and costs met by Northgate. The project was due to go live in Essex in eight weeks' time. Members expressed concern regarding the additional costs involved with having to continue to maintain the old system and on the overrunning project. The Commissioner undertook to provide a detailed report on the Athena project and costs.
- The Commissioner explained that the Estates Strategy was vital for the force, ensuring that the police estate was utilised in the most efficient and effective way. However, he highlighted that the aim of the Estates Strategy was to deliver a more cost-effective and efficient Estate for the future of Essex Police – it was not primarily focused on delivering significant revenue savings.

Following consideration of the report and having listened to the Commissioner's justification of the need for an increase, the Chairman invited the Panel to vote on the Commissioner's proposal for a precept increase of 1.996%, equivalent to an increase of £2.88 a year from £144.27 to £147.15 for a Band D property and thus raising £1.7m of additional council tax receipts.

DECIDED:

That the Commissioner's proposal for a precept increase of 1.996% be accepted.

Councillors Butland, Chambers, Hedley and Isaacs requested that their names be recorded as having voted against.

7. Forward Look

The Panel considered report EPCP/04/15 by the Secretary to the Panel concerning the planning of the Panel's business.

During the debate on the precept, the Panel had identified a number of areas where it required further information or potential items for a future meeting. The Chief Executive of the Commissioner's Office and the Secretary to the Panel undertook to review and update the Panel's Forward Look.

8. Date of Next Meeting

The Panel agreed that the meeting scheduled for Thursday 19 February 2015 was no longer required as a decision had been made on the proposed police precept for 2015/16. As a result of this meeting cancellation, the Panel requested that consideration be given to the meeting scheduled for 25 June being brought forward.

9. Exclusion of the Press and Public

Resolved:

That, having reached the view that the public interest in maintaining the exemption (and discussing the matter in private) outweighed the public interest in disclosing the information, the public (including the press) be excluded from the meeting during consideration of the following item of business on the grounds that it involves the likely disclosure of exempt information as specified in paragraphs 1 and 2 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972.

10. Update on Ongoing Issues

(Exempt under paragraphs 1 and 2 - information relating to any individual or which is likely to reveal the identity of any individual)

The Commissioner gave the Panel advance warning of the upcoming announcement regarding the findings of Operation Maple in respect of the quality of investigations and the management of cases primarily involving the Child Abuse Investigation Team in the North Local Policing Area of Essex.

Chairman
25 June 2015