

Minutes of the meeting of the Essex Police, Fire and Crime Panel, held in Committee Room 1 at County Hall, Chelmsford on Thursday 14 March 2024

Present:

Councillor

Davida Ademuyiwa
(Substitute)

Mary Cunningham
Jay Laplain (Substitute)

Donna Eley

Bob Massey

Mike Garnett

Simon Burwood

James Courtenay

Gina Placey

Maggie Sutton

Aidan McGurran

Representing

Basildon Borough Council

Braintree District Council

Brentwood Borough Council

Chelmsford City Council

Essex County Council

Harlow District Council

Maldon District Council

Southend-on-Sea City Council

Tendring District Council

Uttlesford District Council

Co-opted Member for Balanced Appointment

Co-opted Independent Members

John Gili-Ross (Chairman)

Sheila Murphy

Also in attendance

Gemma Bint

Pippa Brent-Isherwood

Sophie Campion

Ben-Julian Harrington

Roger Hirst

Rick Hylton

Emma Tombs

Democratic Services Officer

Chief Executive, Office of the Essex Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner (OPFCC)

Senior Democratic Services Officer, Secretary to the Panel

Chief Constable, Essex Police

Essex Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner (PFCC)

Chief Fire Officer/Chief Executive, Essex County Fire and Rescue Service

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, including a change to the appointed Member for Essex County Council. Cllr Bob Massey had replaced Cllr Ross Playle. It was noted that this change meant that there was currently no Vice-Chairman of the Panel, but as there were no further Panel meetings scheduled in this municipal year, appointments would be made in the usual way at the Annual meeting in June 2024.
2. The following apologies were noted:
 - Cllr Tony Hedley, Basildon Borough Council – Substitute was Cllr Davida Ademuyiwa

- Cllr Frankie Ricci
- Cllr Russ Savage, Castle Point BC
- Cllr Gary Collins, Thurrock Council
- Cllr Lisa Newport, Rochford DC
- Cllr Barry Aspinell, Brentwood Borough Council, Substitute was Cllr Jay Laplain

3. The following declarations were made by Members:

- For the purposes of transparency Councillor Simon Burwood advised that his daughter was currently a serving Essex Police Officer. Councillor Burwood participated fully in the meeting.

2 Minutes

It was noted that there was an administrative error in the recording of Cllr Simon Burwood's declaration of interest at the last meeting. It was Cllr Burwood's daughter who was a serving police officer, not son as stated in the minutes.

The minutes of the meeting held on 14 March 2024 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

3 Questions to the Chairman from members of the Public

A question, relating to agenda item 4 – 2024/25 High-Level Summary of Progress in Delivering the Police and Crime Plan 2021-2024 and the Fire and Rescue Plan 2019-2024, was put to the Chairman by Mr Neil Gregory, who asked the question as an individual but was a District Councillor from Uttlesford District Council. Making specific reference to the report, the first question was:

"To ask Mr Hirst, via the Chair - How do you think the residents of Uttlesford, in particular the old and vulnerable and those with protected characteristics feel when the Divisional Commander says that 999 calls about drug dealing will not be responded to. How do you think they feel when they see overt drug dealing outside their homes and in their public spaces, day after day. Presumably this is not restricted to Uttlesford, so we wonder how many more lives and communities are blighted. My question is very simple - what are you going to do about it Mr Hirst?"

At the Chairman's request, the Commissioner and Chief Constable responded to the question. It was noted that the public were always encouraged to continue to report drug related crime and the Police used this to build up intelligence and undertake action accordingly. Responding to each individual report was not an efficient use of resources. There was considerable investment in prevention and intervention on drug related crime as this was a priority in the Police and Crime Plan, alongside related work with the National Crime Agency. It was also noted that a County Line gang had been arrested and remanded in custody earlier in the year. The Commissioner encouraged Uttlesford District Council to have drug related crime as a priority within their Community Safety Partnership.

The Panel requested the following information be provided, to which Mr Gregory was agreeable;

- A copy of the response provided to Mr Gregory directly outside of the meeting and a copy of the original letters from Mr Gregory on this issue.
- The detailed information and data provided in the response to Mr Gregory during the meeting, as a document for the Panel's reference.

The Chairman permitted Mr Neil Gregory to ask a second question which was:

"To ask Mr Hirst, via the Chair - The approach taken on drug dealing is a horrifying example of selective, two - tier policing, hurting the most vulnerable. It is not policing by consent as the reaction at your public meeting in Dunmow on 25th January showed. Accordingly, will you please publish the detailed guidance and instructions given to the Force Control Room on dealing with reports of drug dealing. The law abiding public has a right to know on what basis and reasoning Essex Police are abdicating their fundamental responsibilities to them?"

At the Chairman's request, the Commissioner provided a response and stated that there was not a two tier policing system in place. Every call to the police reporting a crime was triaged according to threat, harm and risk and was responded to on the basis of that assessment. Evidence and intelligence based policing was used to deal with the issues and reduce the level of harm. The Commissioner set out the areas of crime where there had been reductions in the numbers across Essex, including incidents of harm and drug driven homicide. The Commissioner was proud of the reductions in crime and considered that it was a result of the three-pronged approach outlined in the response to the first question.

4 High-Level Summary of Progress in Delivering the Police and Crime Plan 2021-2024 and the Fire and Rescue Plan 2019-2024

The Commissioner introduced report EPFCP/03/24 which provided the Panel with a high-level overview of the successes and key areas for improvement since the publication of the Police and Crime Plan 2021-24 and the Fire and Rescue Plan 2019-2024.

During the discussion on the Police and Crime Plan 2021-2024 summary, the following points were made:

- In response to a question relating to the distribution of the additional police officers, the Commissioner provided a breakdown of which departments the officers had been assigned to, with the majority going into frontline teams. It was stated that 116 of the 905 additional officers were in supporting roles. It was acknowledged that in terms of retention, there was a forecast turnover rate of around 6.7% and this had to be factored into the recruitment. The Commissioner and Chief Constable outlined some of the reasons why officers chose to leave and the work which was being done to retain and develop officers.
- The Commissioner clarified the different types of organised crime groups which had been disrupted, about half of which were drug related. The

percentage decreases in crimes were provided in numbers with 1316 fewer crimes of violence with injury offences and 657 fewer knife enabled crimes.

- In response to a query relating to a potential disconnect between what was being reported and what was actually happening regarding Anti-Social Behaviour (ASB) in some areas, the Commissioner advised that quarterly surveys were commissioned, undertaken by a professional market data company, to gain a representative sample across the county and outline the trends. Whilst there was no single absolute measure, all sources were looked at to build a picture of the current position.
- A description of what types of issues were classed as ASB was given, particularly relating to events that caused people distress, alarm or harassment outside of a domestic environment and where people felt threatened or intimidated. It was particularly highlighted that there were successes in dealing with issues through the Community Safety Partnerships.
- A question was asked regarding where ASB had been experienced what was done to capture and share best practice for intervention. It was explained that work was progressed via Community Safety Partnerships. Work undertaken with additional funding under Operation Dial had been shared via Safer Essex. Where there were successes, work was replicated and shared across the county through partnership working. The Deputy Chief Constable was the national lead on ASB and national best practice was captured and delivered.
- With regard to investment in dealing with ASB, it was explained that ASB constituted 10% of everything that came through the control room. Occurrences could often be resolved more swiftly than other crimes. It formed part of the local policing support and overall policing effort, working with partners and place based. Some specific funding streams that contributed to work on this issue were outlined to the Panel including hotspot areas and Government Safer Streets funding among others, that amounted to over £5 million.
- With regard to prevention and educational workstreams to address violence against women and girls, it was confirmed that work was being undertaken to reach out to all schools. There was a joint education team working with schools. Campaigns such as 'reflect and consent' encouraged a reflection by perpetrators on previous behaviours which had been successful. There were adverts across the County to raise awareness. Project Minerva identified high risk hotspot areas.
- It was quoted that there had been an increase in annual investment of £86M to Essex Police since 2016. It was clarified that in the current Plan period March 2021- March 2024 it had been £37.5m plus a further £11.5m, totalling £49m.
- A question was raised as to what measures were in place to support staff particularly those working in the child abuse teams and adult sexual abuse teams. There was no stipulation as to the length of time staff members could work in these specialist teams, as each individual was affected differently. The Commissioner and Chief Constable outlined the wide range of different support schemes, mechanisms and welfare offers

in place to support staff working in high risk areas, as well as those in non-specialist roles.

- The Commissioner confirmed that drug related crime was one of the “big three” priorities. Public confidence levels with regard to Essex Police dealing with these issues were monitored on an on-going basis.
- Panel Members were advised that the appropriate place to feed back community and localised issues was via the Community Safety Partnerships.
- It was confirmed that following a change in practice relating to requests for disclosure under Clare’s Law, the disclosure rate had increased to over 65%. This related to requests for disclosure to a victim or potential victim of domestic abuse, information about a partner or ex-partner’s previous abusive or violent offending.
- It was reported that Essex was the first Police Service to get a successful prosecution under the new law relating to Nitrous Oxide. The Commissioner considered that there had been a positive effect on changing behaviours relating to this offence, since the introduction of the new law.
- The importance of keeping victims and witnesses informed on outcomes from reporting crimes was recognised. It was explained that the information and intelligence gained from reporting fed into targeted watch lists, task patrols and briefings.
- Further to the Casey review and HMICFRS reports, issues of professionalism, trust and confidence in the Police had been reviewed. A data wash of vetting had taken place. The size of the vetting team had been increased and reported allegations were dealt through various reporting lines. The Chief Constable set out how many prospective officers had not met the standard to join Essex Police and where appropriate action that had been taken with current officers. It was considered that there was a robust approach. It was reported that the Panel’s Ethics and Integrity Sub-Committee had received reports on this and been monitoring the issues.

During the discussion on the Fire and Rescue Plan 2019-2024 summary, the following points were made:

- With reference to improvements in culture, it was explained that a lot of work had been done within Essex Fire and Rescue Service following the Lucas Report. The HMICFRS inspections had acknowledged the improvements made. There had been some national recognition in the form of the Fire Service of the Year Award from an external body. There had been a lot of work to review and re-write policy and procedures. Strategies were in place with regard to recruitment, training, ongoing assessment, development and promotion and discipline, to ensure that the service was moving in the right direction. The Chief Fire Officer outlined a number of mechanisms in place to support staff including an independent route to report issues through ‘Safe Share’ and the Core Code of Ethics. A lot of progress had been made. It was confirmed that the Panel’s Ethics and Integrity Sub-Committee had received reports on this and been monitoring the issues.

- Within the HMICFRS national spotlight report on values and culture in fire and rescue services there were 35 recommendations. Of those that were applicable to Essex, all had been implemented at the time of the meeting.
- It was confirmed that 98% of the breathing apparatus use and driving training had been completed at the time of the meeting.
- In terms of moving training from Wethersfield to the Kelvedon Park site, it was confirmed that this was on track and the current timescales were 2026.

The Commissioner agreed to give consideration to the following points raised by the Panel:

- To include the actual numbers as well as percentage figures in future reports
- To provide information on where the 15 Operation Grip serious crime hotspot areas were
- To consider how information on reporting crimes and how it contributed to building intelligence and lead to positive results, could be shared more widely, so that the public understand the importance of reporting crime. It was suggested that this could be linked to the 'Dispatch' publication.

Resolved:

That the Panel received and noted the high-level output reports relating to the Police and Crime Plan 2021-24 and Fire and Rescue Plan 2019-2024.

5 Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner's Decisions Reports

The Panel received report EPFCP/04/24 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

- Decision 158-23 – Minerva Fund Allocations 2023
- Decision 160-23 - SARC Contract 2024-2029 (PFCC)
- Decision 190-23 – SARC Contract 2024-2029 (Essex Police)
- Decision 167-23 - Budget amendment relating to the Provision of Policing Services at Stansted Airport by Essex Police for the period 1st April 2023 to 31st March 2024
- Decision 176-23 - General Patrol Body Armour.
- Decision 203-23 - 7 Force IT Licencing Partner.

The Commissioner explained that there had been some delay with providing redacted information for some of the decisions, but this had now been made available. The Commissioner also explained the reasons behind some decisions being marked as operationally sensitive.

The Panel requested that in future the links to the decisions be provided separately to the agenda pack for their ease of reference.

Resolved:

That the Panel received and noted the report.

6 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:

- The Government response to the Fire Reform White Paper
- Consultation on operational independence for Fire and Rescue Chiefs
- National Joint Council review and reform
- HMICFRS Report of the Essex County Fire and Rescue Service
- Announcements in the Spring Budget
- The Southend, Essex and Thurrock Domestic Abuse Board - Domestic Homicide local oversight review pilot area
- Publication of the Angiolini report and recommendations

Resolved:

That the verbal report was noted.

7 National Association of Police, Fire and Crime Panels Update

The Panel received an update from the Chairman of the Panel, which included the items discussed at the last Executive Committee meeting including;

- Budget and Precept setting meetings
- Liaising with the College of Policing
- Regional support and networks
- Panel Chair and Vice-Chair networking meetings
- Levelling up and Regeneration Act – Mayor and PCC positions
- Preparing for the May Elections
- Meetings in the lead up to the Elections
- National Association membership

Resolved:

That the update was noted.

8 Forward Work Plan

The Panel received report EPFCP/05/24 setting out the planned business of the Panel.

It was noted that the Commissioner's Office had indicated that there would be full closure reports on the Police and Crime Plan and the Fire and Rescue Plan for the Panel's consideration in summer 2024.

Resolved:

That the Panel received and noted the Forward Work Plan, with the addition of the Police and Crime Plan and Fire and Rescue Plan Closure Reports.

9 Date of Next Meeting

The Panel noted that the next meeting would take place on Thursday 20 June 2024.

The Chairman took the opportunity on behalf of the Panel to thank the support team and the Office of the Police, Fire and Commissioner for their work in support of Panel activities over the past year.

There being no urgent business, the meeting closed at 4:45pm.

Chairman