

Minutes of the meeting of the Essex Police, Fire and Crime Panel, held in Committee Room 1 at County Hall, Chelmsford on Thursday 8 December 2022

Present:**Councillor**

David Dadds
Frankie Ricci
Keith Barber
Russ Savage
Paul Stalker
Ross Playle
Mike Garnett
Mark Heard
Ian Shead
Lynda McWilliams
Gary Collins
Jude Deakin
Aidan McGurran

Representing

Basildon Borough Council
Braintree District Council
Brentwood Borough Council
Castle Point Borough Council
Epping Forest District Council
Essex County Council
Harlow District Council
Maldon District Council
Southend-on-Sea City Council
Tendring District 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

Pippa Brent-Isherwood	Chief Executive, Office of the Essex Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner (OPFCC)
Sophie Campion	Senior Democratic Services Officer, Secretary to the Panel
Neil Cross	Chief Finance Officer, Essex County Fire and Rescue Service
Roger Hirst	Essex Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner (PFCC)
Darren Horsman	Strategic Head of Policy and Public Engagement, OPFCC
Emma Hunter	Democratic Services Officer
Rick Hylton	Chief Fire Officer/Chief Executive, Essex County Fire and Rescue Service
Janet Perry	Chief Financial Officer, OPFCC
Andy Prophet	Deputy Chief Constable
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 Lager, Chelmsford City Council

- Cllr Lilley, Colchester City Council
 - Cllr Williams, Rochford District Council
3. The following declarations were made by Members:
- Councillor Lynda McWilliams declared a Code Interest as her son was currently a serving Essex police officer and her granddaughter was a serving special police officer. Councillor McWilliams participated fully in the meeting.
 - Councillor Mark Heard declared a Code Interest as his son was currently a serving Essex police officer. Councillor Heard participated fully in the meeting.
 - Councillor Frankie Ricci declared a Code Interest as his son was currently a serving Essex police officer. Councillor Ricci participated fully in the meeting.

2 Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on 29 September 2022 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

3 Questions to the Chairman from members of the Public

There were none.

4 HMICFRS Inspection of the Essex County Fire and Rescue Service - Progress Report

The Panel received report EPFCP/30/22 which reviewed how the Essex County Fire and Rescue Service (ECFRS) was addressing the issues raised in its latest inspection by His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire and Rescue Services (HMICFRS) and how the PFCC is monitoring and ensuring progress against this.

The Commissioner introduced the report and commented that this report was an important measure of the progress made within the service and the areas that still required improvement and formed a valuable oversight. A re-inspection was due in January to review progress since the last inspection.

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

- Emergency Services working jointly together and training together. Information was provided on joint training, the work of the Essex Resilience Forum and how the learning from the Manchester bombing incident was being embedded.
- It was explained the Power BI (Business Intelligence) was a piece of software to monitor Key Performance Indicators and produce performance data. The RBIP - Risk Based Inspection Programme was being redesigned to take into account the better available information.

- It was advised that protection remained the area of focus for improvement and continuing to improve the culture of the service.
- Secondary employment and monitoring staff working hours – improvements had been made in this area since the report with a process in place for declaring all secondary employment, although it remained the responsibility of the employee to ensure that they were rested and safe to work. Better assurance was still needed, with systems put in place to monitor the data more closely on a more strategic level.
- The timescales for the inspections and publication of the report were explained. There had been a short period between the first and second inspection and a delayed publication of the final report. Feedback regarding the timings for publication of reports was being taken on board for future inspections. The Chairman indicated that he would be prepared to write to the Inspectorate in support of a more efficient process if that was felt helpful.
- The Commissioner explained what was being done to improve processes regarding dealing with bullying and harassment cases and what measures had been put in place to support staff and improve the culture, including various training programmes, workshops and support measures. Measures to improve diversity within the service were also outlined. It was confirmed that feedback from exit interviews was captured where they were taken up.
- The share of full-time and on-call firefighters was related to the geography of the area, in Essex this was a balance between urban more densely populated areas and rural less populated areas, determined through a strategic assessment of risk. The Commissioner confirmed areas where there were shared and co-located premises with other services.
- The Commissioner explained the improvements to whistle-blowing services that had been brought in and which systems had been considered and the reasons why particular systems were not considered suitable for the service.
- The Commissioner set out what had been done to make changes from the top down to improve culture, including bringing in the previous Chief Fire Officer who had no experience of Essex or the Fire Service, but had significant change management experience to help make improvements and bring about cultural change to the service.
- The focus had been on improving against the ‘causes for concern’ and ‘inadequate areas’. In two of the inspection areas which had gone backwards in terms of grading, there had been improvements in reporting and understanding the situation which had contributed to this, but it was hoped that now the issues had been fully understood improvements were being made.

It was agreed that further information would be provided to the Panel on the following:

- Information on the plan for joint emergency services training

Resolved:

That the Panel received and noted the report.

5 Essex Police's Policy and Performance in relation to Deployment to Incidents

The Panel received report EPFCP/31/22 which clarified for Panel members, Essex Police's policy on deployment to incidents, with a focus on high harm contact management, and how it performs against this. The report provided an overview of Essex Police's Command and Control of Incidents Policy, an assessment of how well Essex Police responded to high harm crimes, and a summary of the ambitions for future delivery.

The Commissioner thanked the Panel for focusing on this issue to look at whether the attendance policies and targets were being met. Work was now being done to improve where needed to meet requirements.

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

- Members thanked the Police service for the opportunity to attend the visits to the Control Room and it was confirmed that there could be future opportunities to visit again.
- The classifications of 'Emergency', 'Priority' and 'Routine' were explained in the context of Rape and Serious Sexual Offences. Concern was raised regarding the capture of evidence for these crimes in particular and the need to respond and attend more quickly. The Commissioner brought to the Panel's attention the improvement in reporting rates and improved conviction rates, however it was acknowledged that these were still unacceptably low. It was recognised that the process could be very distressing for the victim. It was explained that in some cases where a prosecution was not being sought by the victim from the outset other professionals such as independent sexual violence advisors were used. The best ways to support victims were being looked at. There was an aim to improve the attendance and response times.
- In terms of the increasing frequency of exceptional events and recovering costs for these, the Commissioner explained that a Task and Finish Group had a specific remit looking at the minimum resource level required to have the flexibility to meet those calls on the service. The Commissioner also commented on some of the exceptional events that Essex Police had been involved in supporting through the year including Operation London Bridge following the death of Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II. There were also other events such as the Just Stop Oil protests and the Commissioner confirmed what processes were in place to apply through Central Government for reimbursement via special grants for certain types of event response.
- It was confirmed that the plans for the Essex Police Headquarters were available in the public domain and involved investment to improve facilities and disposal of part of the land to fund the required investment.

- Video technology to help improve the victim experience was being explored and the potential benefits were explained to the Panel.
- It was confirmed that there were already some volunteer victim support staff in place and extension of this was being looked at.
- The improvements to the call answering times of the 101 service were explained including recruiting more staff and investment in better technology. Where it had been made more effective, more calls were being received, but this was welcomed as crime reporting helped with planning interventions to stop crime. Further plans were in place to improve the way the Control Room works.
- Queries were raised regarding the lack of information in the report on response and attendance for lower level crimes and public trust and confidence in the Police. Queries were also raised relating to partner organisations who may be suited to respond to some incidents and how they could be more involved where this was the case. In response the Commissioner explained that there were a lot of incremental improvements over time. The level of public confidence had improved in the independently commissioned survey, including victims of crime. Work was being done on a national basis regarding incidents involving supporting people with mental health issues and the impact on police resources. Work was being done in that area to improve handover to other agencies and to provide better support and resourcing. Partnership solutions were needed.
- The Deputy Chief Constable confirmed that response teams were being looked at in terms of upskilling and broadening out response accountability, how an incident may be responded to and by which team, including detectives and sexual offences teams. The resourcing to meet demand was being looked at in a more analytic way.
- Concerns around the use of the 999 service and 101 service were raised, including the need to re-educate the public on the correct use of each, the need for specialist support and experts in certain areas such as sexual offences in the control room and the original intention for more of a multi-agency 101 service response. The Commissioner reported that having mental health experts in the control room was proving to be working well. The video technology could provide the opportunity for specialist officers to interact with victims at the point of initial contact.
- A member noted and was grateful that the response to the Just Stop Oil protests by Essex Police had not interfered with the press carrying out their role.

It was agreed that further information would be provided to the Panel on the following:

- Figures on recruitment and retention of control room staff for the past few years.
- Details on how long the policy of always attending a residential burglary incident with the aim of attending within one hour, had been in place.
- Figures on percentages of attendance at crime scenes by the Forensic services in a domestic setting.

Resolved:

That the Panel received and noted the report.

6 Police and Crime Plan Closure 2016 to 2021 Closure Report

The Panel received report EPFCP/32/22 which provided a review of the delivery of the priorities in the 'Police and Crime Plan 2016 to 2020' and the 'Police and Crime Plan 2020 to 2021 Extension'.

The Panel had participated in a workshop to discuss the content of the report and receive an overview of the report findings. As agreed at the previous meeting of the Panel, the workshop had also provided an opportunity for the Commissioner to explain how the previous Police and Crime Plan priorities had fed into the new Plan priorities and the linkages between them.

On Page 98 of the agenda pack, the figures from the independent public survey were clarified and it was noted that there was a small typo correction regarding the date of the postponed election which was in 2020.

Resolved:

That the Panel received and noted the report.

7 The 2023/24 Budget - Update of Progress on setting the 2023/24 Budget

The Panel received report EPFCP/33/22 which provided an update of the progress on setting the 2023/24 budgets for both Essex Police and Essex County Fire and Rescue Service, including the background issues and latest assumptions being used in drafting the 2023/24 budgets.

The Commissioner introduced the report setting out the cost pressures, savings targets and potential deficit for the Essex Police budget-setting for 2023/24 based on the latest assumptions. The Commissioner then set out the position for the Essex County Fire and Rescue Service budget-setting for 2023/24, including the projected shortfall, the current pay situation and lobbying of government regarding funding.

The Panel had formed a working group which had met twice to go through the details of the budget-setting process, with a further meeting scheduled in January 2023 prior to the next Panel meeting.

In response to a query regarding the suggestion of a flat rate pay rise for the Fire Service which had been supported by the Commissioner but had not been supported at the national level, the Commissioner commented that he felt that the timing of the meeting and national issues at the time may have affected the discussion at that time. It was likely that this may be raised again in the future but the funding settlement would need to be understood prior to any further discussion.

It was confirmed that the pay rise for the Police Service had been a flat rate of £1,900 which meant a higher percentage increase for lower paid staff and smaller percentage increase for the higher paid.

During the discussion the Chairman put forward a motion to extend the meeting length beyond three hours should this be required, which was seconded by Cllr Keith Barber. The motion having been proposed and seconded was put to the vote and **carried**.

Resolved:

That the Panel noted the background issues, the latest assumptions, and the progress in setting the 2023/24 budgets for Essex Police and Essex County Fire and Rescue Service.

8 Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner's Decisions Reports

The Panel received and raised questions on report EPFCP/34/22 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 131 - Essex Police College Headquarters L Block Demolition / Replacement of Modular Buildings (Contract Award)

Appendix B – Fire and Rescue Decisions

- Details behind Ref 032 ECFRS Training Centre – Stage 1 Report

Resolved:

That the Panel received and noted the report.

9 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:

- Just Stop Oil protests – partnership working and reimbursement
- Precept Survey – more positive response towards an increase in the precept
- Successful recruitment of Assistant Chief Officer replacement
- Kent Police had appointed a new Chief Constable
- Devolution proposal

In response to questions, the Commissioner confirmed that work was being done to improve public confidence in police responses. In terms of data from the survey, it was confirmed that mosaic data was used and there would be a full report from the independent researcher with the precept report in February.

Resolved:

That the verbal report was noted.

10 Essex PFCP Budget Half Year Outturn Report 2022/23

The Panel received report EPFCP/35/22 which updated the Panel on the Essex Police, Fire and Crime Panel's outturn position for the period 1 April 2022 to 30 September 2022 as filed with the Home Office prior to the deadline of 31 October 2022. As Essex County Council was the lead authority for the Panel the return was required to be signed off by ECC's finance team once checked for accuracy. This was with respect to a grant claim to the Home Office who would only pay for reimbursement of actual expenditure incurred in year.

Resolved:

That the report was noted.

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.

An update on the NAPFCP AGM and Panel Conference had been circulated to the Panel prior to the meeting and would be published with the minutes.

Resolved:

That the verbal report was noted.

12 Dates of Future Meetings

The Panel received report EPFCP/36/22 informing Members of the remaining meeting dates for 2022-23 and set out the proposed meeting dates for 2023-24.

Resolved:

That the future meeting dates were noted.

13 Forward Work Plan

The Panel received report EPFCP/37/22 setting out the planned business of the Panel.

Resolved:

That the Panel received the report, agreeing the addition of an item for consideration as discussed under the agenda item on Essex Police's Policy and

Performance in relation to Deployment to Incidents; specifically 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.

14 Date of Next Meeting

The Panel noted that the next meeting would take place on Tuesday 7 February 2023 at 10:00am.

There being no urgent business, the meeting closed at 4:53pm.