

Minutes of the meeting of the Essex Police, Fire and Crime Panel, held in Committee Room 1 at County Hall, Chelmsford on Thursday 7 December 2023

**Present:**

**Councillor**

Anthony Hedley  
Barry Aspinell  
Donna Eley  
Mike Lilley  
Ross Playle  
Mike Garnett  
Richard Lambourne  
(Substitute)  
James Courtenay  
Frankie Ricci

**Representing**

Basildon Borough Council  
Brentwood Borough Council  
Chelmsford City Council  
Colchester City Council  
Essex County Council  
Harlow District Council  
Rochford District Council  
  
Southend-on-Sea City Council  
Co-opted Member for Balanced Appointment

**Co-opted Independent Members**

John Gili-Ross (Chairman)  
Sheila Murphy

**Also in attendance**

Gemma Bint	Democratic Services Officer
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
Roger Hirst	Essex Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner (PFCC)
Rick Hylton	Chief Fire Officer/Chief Executive, Essex County Fire and Rescue Service
Janet Perry	Chief Financial Officer and Strategic head of performance and Resources (OPFCC)
Andy Prophet	Deputy Chief Constable
Emma Tombs	Democratic Services Manager
Paul Turner	Director of Legal and Assurance (item 16 only, via Zoom)

**1 Membership, Apologies and Declarations of Interest**

1. The membership of the Panel was noted.
2. The following apologies were noted:
  - Cllr Lisa Newport, Rochford District Council – Cllr Richard Lambourne substituted
  - Cllr Gina Placey, Tendring District Council
  - Cllr Mary Cunningham, Braintree District Council
  - Cllr Russ Savage, Castle Point Borough Council
  - Cllr Simon Burwood, Maldon District Council
  - Cllr Aidan McGurran

- Cllr Gary Collins, Thurrock Council
3. The following declarations were made by Members:
- John Gili-Ross declared a Disclosable Pecuniary Interest in agenda item 16 – Process for Appointment of Independent Co-opted Members, due to being one of the current Co-opted Independent Members. Mr Gili-Ross left the meeting prior to this item and took no part in the discussion or vote.
  - Sheila Murphy declared a Disclosable Pecuniary Interest in agenda item 16 – Process for Appointment of Independent Co-opted Members, due to being one of the current Co-opted Independent Members. Ms Murphy left the meeting prior to this item and took no part in the discussion or vote.
  - For the purposes of transparency Councillor Frankie Ricci advised that his step-son was currently a serving Essex police officer. Councillor Ricci participated fully in the meeting.

## **2 Minutes**

The minutes of the meeting held on 28 September 2023 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 Police and Crime Plan Performance Measures – Quarter 2 2023/24**

The Panel received report EPFCP/29/23 which provided an overview of Essex Police's progress in delivering the priorities set out in the Police and Crime Plan, based on data and other information to the end of September 2023.

The Commissioner introduced the report and drew attention to some of the highlights, including the downward trend in anti-social behaviour and drug driven homicides, drawing attention to the initiatives and investment in these areas. Attention was also drawn to the progress made with regard to domestic abuse cases relating to the total number of cases for the most recent 12 month period and fewer repeat victims. It was reported that some other crimes had risen and there were newly defined crimes, some of which were more challenging to deal with. There was a need to step up interventions in those areas which had seen an increase in crime, with a focus on repeat offenders and protecting vulnerable people. There had also been some improvement in public confidence.

The Chairman wished to acknowledge some of the good work that had been done including related to anti-social behaviour and the work of the Marine Unit.

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

- It was noted that there had been a downward trend in the number of Specials recruited and retained and Members sought clarity on the reasons why and what was being done to address it. In response it was reported that 39% of Specials had left to join the regulars. It was noted that there had been previous success a few years prior recruiting to the Specials, but levels of recruitment were consistent with other volunteering opportunities and there had been a decline following the pandemic and due to the cost of living crisis. A lot of work was going into encouraging recruitment including through focus groups, a task force and outreach materials among others.
- In response to queries regarding staff sickness levels it was explained that there was a frequent number of musculoskeletal absences due to the nature of the work. It was harder to identify the reason behind miscellaneous absences and more work was being done to look at the increase and trends. In the longer term it was moving in a positive direction. It was confirmed that regular welfare checks were undertaken by managers and this was carefully monitored. There was an expectation that all sickness absences were recorded within 24 hours. There was also more specialist support through the occupational health team.
- Clarification was sought regarding the reasons for an increase in domestic abuse offences and the number of prosecutions. It was explained that the step change seen in 2017/18 coincided with the introduction of the coercive and controlling behaviour offence, broadening the domestic crime offences. Campaigns were undertaken at the time with involvement from Councils to raise awareness of these new crimes alongside investment in victim awareness and support. Improved interventions were considered to be having an effect in reducing the numbers, with the use of advisers, better use of protection notices and perpetrator programmes. It was confirmed that in the 12 months to the end of October 2023, 11.2% of domestic abuse cases had been solved.
- With regard to the breakdown of Killed and Seriously Injured (KSI) figures, it was clarified that in the year to date 2023, there had been 730 collisions resulting in a KSI, with 38 of those being fatalities. It was suggested that where possible, a percentage against overall figures was useful context i.e. the comparison of 38 deaths due to road crimes compared with 18 deaths due to all other crime in the same period. It was suggested that it would be helpful for the Panel to see a breakdown of the figures, against the overall numbers in future reports.
- The Extra Eyes programme relating to dashcam footage had been introduced in the past couple of years. The Commissioner provided details of the submissions which had been received in September of this year.
- The Commissioner confirmed that the services had positive action focussed recruitment campaigns to actively encourage applications from minority communities. It was noted that more work was needed to encourage a more diverse workforce within the Police Community Support Officer roles.
- With regard to speed indicator devices and vehicle activated signs, the Commissioner set out the different types that were available with some considered more effective than others. In response to a question

regarding what is done with the information collected by the signs i.e. number of speeding vehicles, it was advised that either the Community Speed Watch could be increased to gather more information and follow up with individuals or deploy mobile police enforcement if the issues is persistent in a particular area.

- It was explained that the number of sexual offences increased during Covid; the Police recording practices had improved and there had been societal change. In terms of improving the situation, it was explained that parental and school control and the intervention of Social Services had a key role as well as Policing. The Commissioner gave an example of a successful operation in this area resulting in 500 incidents being investigated.
- A question was raised relating to the reasons why the solved rates for rape cases were low. It was explained that the Service was recognised for outstanding recording of offences, and there had been a rise over time. It was considered that the work that had been done in this area was starting to have an effect and over the last 12 months the numbers recorded had fallen by 16%. The Service had become more supportive of the reporting of historical incidents which had accounted for a third of the overall numbers and had resulted in a backlog, but that was now improving. The way in which victims were supported was also changing and learning from national pilots was being embedded. The number of cases solved and the number of rape prosecutions was improving but was nowhere near where it needed to be yet.
- The Commissioner clarified that he did not consider that it was the time to change the priorities and focus away from high harm crimes, to lower level crimes such as shoplifting. The focus was on continuing to do what was working. The work that was being done with young people to divert them away from getting involved in crime and changing behaviours, it was hoped would work for crimes such as retail theft as well as the high harm crime. There was a Business Crime Partnership in place in Essex which was having a positive effect on shop theft.
- In terms of drug related crime, the Commissioner confirmed that there was a three pronged approach of focussing on the organisers, using methods such as stop and search and knife arches to get weapons and drugs off the street and the long-term solution through partnership working.
- The Panel acknowledged the good piece of work through the Minerva Project training.

The Commissioner agreed to provide further information on the following issue:

- Statistics for motorcycle theft as part of the breakdown of theft figures

**Resolved:**

That the Panel received and noted the report.

## 5 Fire and Rescue Plan Performance Measures – Quarter 2 2023/24

The Panel received report EPFCP/30/23 which provided an overview of Essex County Fire and Rescue Service's progress in delivering the priorities set out in the Fire and Rescue Plan 2020 – 2024 during Quarter 2 of 2023/24.

The Chairman wished to congratulate the Service on achieving the national award for Road Safety.

The Commissioner introduced the report and drew attention to the increase in special services incidents, more accidents on the road post Covid, although noting this was still on a long term downward trend. The prevention activity had been successful with reductions in the number of fires across a number of categories. Core station coverage had increased. The areas of continued focus included; the number of false alarms and unwanted fire signals, an increase in road traffic collisions, reduced availability, prevention activity and sickness rate.

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

- The Specialist Services provided included road traffic incidents, responding to medical emergencies, rescues, making areas safe, environmental incidents including flooding, hazardous incidents, domestic incidents and suicide attempts.
- In relation to the data breaches, the incidents which had been reported to the Information Commissioners Officer (ICO) had not resulted in any financial sanctions. All of the recommendations made were in an action plan which was being implemented. There had also been an Information Governance Audit undertaken resulting in further recommendations to improve which were all in progress. It was understood that the data breaches had not resulted in any material or financial suffering.
- It was confirmed that there was currently no recording in the data of whether vehicles involved in incidents were electric vehicles.
- In response to a question relating to the extended response times over 30 minutes, it was explained that the primary factors were due to vague locations provided and technical issues with communications on recording. Three incidents involved individuals, none of which sustained injuries or required hospital treatment.
- It was reported that the 17 point action plan in place to improve availability, contained some actions which were due to be completed by the end of December 2023, some by the end of March 2024 and some improvements were incremental, although improvement was already being seen. It was hoped that the incremental benefit would be seen within 6-9 months.
- The Commissioner advised that many of the false alarms occurred in hospitals and would always be responded to. It was noted that 53% of false alarms were made with good intent, only 2% were malicious and 45% were due to faulty/malfunctioning equipment. Work was being done to address non-domestic attendance and educating businesses, but there was no intention to deter people from calling the emergency services.

- It was confirmed that so far there was no evidence to suggest that there was an issue placing electric charging points for cars on a petrol forecourt and the evidence showed that electric vehicle fires were rare. The concern was with charging electric vehicles such as e-scooters indoors using cheaper or not the original charging equipment.
- The issue with availability at Braintree station had been due to the loss of key staff but that had been addressed through dynamic deployment.
- The Commissioner confirmed that there was a commitment to continue with the successful Fire Break Scheme.

**Resolved:**

That the Panel received and noted the report.

**6 The 2024/25 Budget – Update on progress in setting the 2024/25 Budget**

The Panel received report EPFCP/31/23 which provided the Panel with an update of the progress on setting the 2024/25 budgets for both Essex Police and Essex County Fire and Rescue Service, including the background issues and latest assumptions being used in drafting the 2024/25 budgets.

The Commissioner thanked Panel Members for engaging in the Budget Setting Working Group. He drew attention to the revised assumptions and projected deficits. The policy statement by the Secretary of State related to the precept limits was confirmed as £13 for a Band D property for Policing and 3% for Fire and Rescue, both of which were lower than the previous year. The Commissioner set out some preliminary results from the Precept Survey.

**Resolved:**

That the Panel noted the background issues, the latest assumptions, and the progress in setting the 2024/25 budgets for Essex Police and Essex County Fire and Rescue Service.

**7 Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner's Decisions Reports**

The Panel received report EPFCP/32/23 which provided information about financial and strategic decisions made by the PFCC.

There were a number of decisions where the detailed information was not yet available online. It was confirmed that this would be updated as and when detail could be published and these decisions would be highlighted in the second part of the decisions report headed 'Decisions previously reported and published since the last meeting of the Police, Fire and Crime Panel'.

The Panel sought further clarification on the following decisions:

Appendix A – Police Decisions

- Ref 141-23 - Mobile Phone Replacement Programme – the Commissioner agreed to provide information on what was done with the phones which were being replaced.
- Ref 128-23 Recruitment to Temporary Posts

**Resolved:**

That the Panel received and noted the report.

**8 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:

- HMICFRS Inspection of the Fire and Rescue Service draft report
- Decision to award the contract for a new live fire training centre
- Planning permission for flagship project to co-locate the Police and Fire & Rescue Services in Dovercourt
- Tell the County Fire and Rescue Service Survey
- Government response to the Anti-Social Behaviour and Community Safety Partnership Consultation

In response to questions it was confirmed that;

- The movement of the Fire Training facility from Witham Fire Station would not impact on the coverage or operational commitment.
- There was no statutory duty for the Fire and Rescue Service to respond to flooding, however the service did respond to incidents particularly to fulfil the risk to life rescue function. However with regard to availability for other functions such as pumping road flooding away, this would need to be weighed against ensuring the primary function of the fire and rescue service was not affected.

**Resolved:**

That the verbal report was noted.

**9 Annual Complaints Report 2022/23**

The Panel received report EPFCP/33/23 which provided the Panel with an update on the handling of complaints made against the Essex Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner (PFCC) since 1 October 2022.

**Resolved:**

That the Panel received and noted the report.

**10 Report of the Ethics and Integrity Sub-Committee**

The Panel received report EPFCP/34/23 providing the minutes from the Ethics and Integrity Sub-Committee meeting held on 20 September 2023.

**Resolved:**

That the minutes were noted.

**11 Essex PFCP Budget Half Year Outturn Report 2023/24**

The Panel received report EPFCP/35/23 which updated the Panel on the Essex Police, Fire and Crime Panel's outturn position for the period 1 April 2023 to 30 September 2023 as filed with the Home Office prior to the deadline of 27 October 2023. This was with respect to a grant claim to the Home Office who would only pay for reimbursement of actual expenditure incurred in year. 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, and it was confirmed that this sign off was obtained.

**Resolved:**

That the report was noted.

**12 National Association of Police, Fire and Crime Panels Update**

The Panel received a written update from the Chairman of the Panel, which included an update on recent consultations and meetings, the AGM and Annual Panel Conference and some sector specific points of interest.

**Resolved:**

That the written update was noted.

**13 Forward Work Plan**

The Panel received report EPFCP/36/23 setting out the planned business of the Panel.

**Resolved:**

That the Panel received and noted the Forward Work Plan.

**14 Date of Next Meeting**

The Panel noted that the next meeting would take place on Thursday 1 February 2024.

**15 Urgent Business**

There was no urgent business.



## 16 Process for Appointment of Independent Co-opted Members

The Panel received report EPFCP/37/23 which proposed a process for appointing the Panel's independent co-opted Members. The terms of office for the current independent co-opted Members were due to expire on 31 July 2024. The current independent co-opted Members left the meeting at this point having declared disclosable pecuniary interests in connection with the report.

Concern was raised by some Panel Members regarding the timing of the proposed recruitment process for the co-opted independent Members. It was suggested that there would be some benefit for continuity purposes, in offering an extension to the current co-opted independent Members, to cover the period of local elections and PFCC elections to ensure that the Panel retained experienced Members during that period of possible uncertainty and potential change to Panel membership.

The Director of Legal and Assurance, Essex County Council, provided some context to the report and advice to the Panel, regarding the provision for this recruitment process in the Panel's Constitution and Panel Arrangements. The Panel Arrangements, which had been agreed by all 15 Constituent Authorities, did not allow for an extension to the terms of office and therefore any proposal to do this would be a breach of the Panel's Constitution.

In response to questions and comments it was noted that;

- Whilst re-appointing current independent Members for more than two terms would be against the Home Office guidance, the Panel could choose to do this, although it would be helpful to set out the rationale for doing so.
- There had been a reasonable number of applications made to the last recruitment campaign.
- The current co-opted independent Members may not wish for their current term of office to be extended.
- Some Panel Members were not persuaded that the rationale in offering an extension to the current appointment period was strong enough to breach the Panel's Constitution.
- It was additionally noted that the eligibility criteria as set out in Appendix B would be subject to minor administrative updates.

It was proposed by Cllr Frankie Ricci and seconded by Cllr Mike Lilley that recommendation 1 be amended to read;

‘That the existing independent co-opted Members be offered an extension to their term of office of six months, with the proposed recruitment approach set out in paragraph 3.6 of the report subsequently adopted, should either or both of them decline the extension’.

The amended recommendation was put to the meeting and was **lost**.

The recommendations as set out in the report were put to the meeting and it was;

**Resolved:**

1. That the Panel agreed to recruit two independent co-opted Members following the timetable set out in paragraph 3.6 of the report, noting that the current co-opted members were welcome to apply to be re-appointed.
2. That the Panel agreed that the same eligibility criteria be used as were used in 2020 as attached at Appendix B to the report.

There being no urgent business, the meeting closed at 4:22pm.