

Minutes of the meeting of the Essex Police, Fire and Crime Panel: Ethics and Integrity Sub-Committee, held in the Council Chamber at County Hall on Tuesday, 22 March 2022

Present**Representing**

John Gili-Ross (Chairman)	Independent Member
Cllr Lynda McWilliams	Tendring District Council
Cllr Ian Shead	Southend Borough Council

Also present

Gemma Bint	Democratic Services Officer
Pippa Brent-Isherwood	Chief Executive and Monitoring Officer, Office of the Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner for Essex
Sophie Campion	Senior Democratic Services Officer
Roger Hirst	Essex Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner
Gemma Smith	Head of Vetting, Essex Police
Emma Tombs	Democratic Services Manager

1 Membership, Apologies, Substitutions and Declarations of Interest

1. The membership of the Sub-Committee was noted.
2. An apology had been received from Councillor Godfrey Isaacs, Vice-Chairman of the Panel, CastlePoint Borough Council.
3. Councillor Lynda McWilliams declared a Code Interest as her son was currently a serving police officer. Councillor McWilliams participated fully in the meeting.

2 Minutes of the Previous Meeting

The minutes of the meeting held on 21 September 2021 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

3 Process of Recruitment and Vetting for Police Officers

The Sub-Committee received report EISC/01/22 from Roger Hirst, Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner. At its meeting in October 2021, the Essex Police, Fire and Crime Panel had requested a report on the process of recruitment / vetting for police officers in Essex following the murder of Sarah Everard by Wayne Couzens, who was then a serving officer with the Metropolitan Police Service. This report responded to that request by setting out the Essex Police position in relation to a letter from the National Police Chiefs' Council (NPCC) dated 8 October 2021 which detailed several key requirements for Police Professional Standards Departments and Vetting Units across the country.

The Commissioner introduced the report explaining that it set out the investment that had been made in Professional Standards and vetting as part of the Force Growth Plan. A significant contribution had been made to reduce the backlog in

vetting. Various workstreams had been undertaken, some collaboratively with the seven regions across the East of England to achieve a more standardised approach.

The Commissioner clarified that the liability for the vetting process sat with the Chief Constable by statute and the Commissioner was there to support him and provide constructive scrutiny.

The report described the extensive programme of work put in place under the leadership of Gemma Smith, Head of Vetting to ensure that vetting renewals were completed in a timely manner. In terms of addressing the principal responsibilities as defined by the NPCC authorised professional practice for vetting guidance, the report set this out and provided assurance that the service was almost entirely compliant. The areas where further work was needed to be fully implemented were highlighted in the report. Overall the Commissioner considered the vetting within Essex Police to be in a good position and that they were building on that with further improvements going forward.

In response to questions from Members the following points were made:

- The DBS checks were carried out by a separate dedicated team.
- Vetting was carried out in order of priority so as not to disadvantage anyone.
- In this country there were low crime rates compared with high levels of personal liberties, through policing by consent. There was a need to be reflective of society in recruitment, but also to ensure that following that recruitment there were no barriers to progression through other processes such as vetting and promotion to ensure there was no disproportionality.
- A really comprehensive vetting process was in place whether or not it was within the seven force region. The advantage within the seven force region was access to all of the records and history for a transferee due to having a shared system. Nationally, if someone transferred in and their prior vetting was over 12 months ago a full re-vet would be undertaken. Under 12 months would be at the force's discretion. Corruption and integrity would have to be looked at particularly where there was a live investigation.
- Copies of deed-poll records and previous names were required and across the 13 systems used it was a comprehensive process. Vetting required a minimum of 5 years clearance.
- There were processes in place for Police Standards and misconduct hearings and there had been a range of outcomes from officers going through those processes. An improvement that was being worked on was to have written warnings accessible. Every misconduct hearing which resulted in a sanction which was not a dismissal, the outcome would be reviewed as to whether or not the officer should still hold that level of vetting. Conditions could be put within the vetting clearance or they could be reviewed more regularly. Re-postings to other departments could be made where appropriate.

- It was confirmed that there were no plans to outsource this service. Although it would be theoretically possible to have a national structure, it was considered to be beneficial to have a service that responded to and was flexible to local circumstances and given the collaboration on some systems and processes, particularly through the seven force, it was considered to be working well. There were a number of potential issues identified with a national process, including due to accessing different IT systems, with effective governance and scrutiny and with differing processes between forces for managing risks. There was a national Contractor Vetting Scheme for certain sizes of contract, however they did not perform all of the checks themselves, rather they referred to local forces for certain information. In terms of national group triaging, that could be looked at, however triaging was already done through the recruitment eligibility process which filtered out candidates that were not suitable based on disclosures. Cost evaluation depending on whether vetting was done early on in the process or later in the process had been undertaken and in Essex this was done at the end of the process which was more cost effective as fewer candidates failed, having passed through the other parts of the recruitment process.
- The procedure with regard to data protection and the storage and retention of information was explained and it was confirmed that the database was solely for vetting applications and separate to other intelligence systems which have different retention processes.
- A question was raised regarding confidence in the police and what checks were in place to monitor behaviours beyond the vetting and recruitment process. The Commissioner advised that some really constructive work had taken place within the Fire and Rescue Service around behaviours, following previously identified cultural issues. However work within the Police service had not been commissioned in the same way. The Commissioner agreed to consider the issue of how behaviours are monitored within the Police Service beyond the vetting and recruitment process with the Chief Constable.

The Chairman put a public question to the Commissioner which had been raised by a member of the public at the previous meeting of the Panel which related to recruitment:

“Essex Police recruitment pages online make no mention about the force needing operational staff 24/7/365, which means rest day or annual leave cancellations on occasion. (E.g. Local Policing Teams, Force Control Room, OSG, proposed High-Harm Teams).

I totally support encouraging a diverse range of people to join up though ensuring rigorous training and an understanding of what comes with doing said job before starting any application is surely essential?”

Response – The Commissioner advised that the recruitment website states that the job involved shift work and involved weekend work. In relation to the Force Control Room and Resolution Centre it was stated that it ran 24 hours a day, 365 days a year. The Force required attendance by prospective new officers at a mandatory briefing before attending an

assessment centre at which it was made clear regarding the shift work pattern across 365 days and that on occasions it would be necessary to extend duty beyond the shifts and the impact on work life balance. There were also 26 recruitment ambassadors who gave a realistic preview on working within the Service. All new candidates for the Force Control Room were also given a briefing which included information on shifts. It was recognised that further information such as early sight of a shift pattern would be helpful and the wider review of the website would include that. Once new recruits had completed 12months service, there was a review to get feedback on how they were adapting to see how they were coping with the transition. That informed the process going forward.

Members of the Sub-Committee noted that it was positive that these expectations were set out during the process.

RESOLVED:

That members of the Sub-Committee noted the report and that an item on how behaviours are monitored within the Police Service be brought to a future meeting of the Sub-Committee.

5 Date of Next Meeting

The date and time of the next meeting was to be arranged for September/October 2022.

6 Urgent Business

There was no urgent business. The meeting closed at 2.00pm

Chairman