

Police and Crime Panel for Lancashire

Minutes of the Meeting held on Monday 27th January 2014 at 10.00 am in Meeting Room A, Town Hall, Blackburn

Present:

Chair

Councillor Kate Hollern, Blackburn with Darwen Borough Council

Committee Members

Councillor Pam Barton, Hyndburn Borough Council
Councillor Simon Blackburn, Blackpool Council
Councillor Alistair Bradley, Chorley Borough Council
Councillor Margaret Brindle, Burnley Borough Council
Councillor Maxine Chew, Flyde Borough Council
Councillor Robert Boswell, Preston City Council
Councillor Margaret Smith, South Ribble Borough Council
Councillor Peter Gibson, Wyre Borough Council
Councillor Sean Serridge, Rossendale Borough Council
Councillor Ian Grant, West Lancs Borough Council
Councillor Stuart Hirst, Ribble Valley Borough Council
County Councillor Jennifer Mein, Lancashire County Council
Councillor David Smith, Lancaster City Council
Councillor Malcolm Thomas, Lancaster City Council
Councillor Julie Cooper, Burnley Borough Council
Paul Richardson, Independent co-opted member

Also in attendance

- Ms Sian Roxborough, Secretary to the Police and Crime Panel.
- Mr C Grunshaw, Police and Crime Commissioner for Lancashire.
- Ms M Carruthers-Watt, Chief Executive - Office of the PCC.
- Ms Lisa Kitto, Chief Finance Officer, Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner for Lancashire
- Mr Sayyed Osman, Director of Environment, Housing Blackburn with Darwen Borough Council
- Mr Phil Llewellyn, Executive and Councillor Support Manager, Blackburn with Darwen Borough Council.

1. Welcome and Apologies

The Chair, Councillor Kate Hollern, welcomed all present to the meeting.

Apologies were received from Councillors David Eaves, (Fylde Borough Council), Liz Oades, (Fylde Borough Council), Margaret Foxley, (Pendle Borough Council), Alyson Barnes, Rossendale Borough Council, and Shiraj Vali, (Independent co-opted Member).

2. Minutes of the Meeting

Resolved: That the minutes of the meeting held on 15th October 2013 be confirmed as an accurate record and signed by the Chair.

3. Declarations of Interest

No Declarations of Interest were submitted.

4. Public Questions

No public questions had been received.

5. Monitoring of Complaints

The Police and Crime Panel received a report which set out the current position with regard to complaints received to date in relation to the Police and Crime Commissioner.

Since the last report there had been one complaint made against the Police and Crime Commissioner, which was set out in the appendix of the report.

The Panel were asked to note the current position regarding the complaints received to date.

The Chair indicated that she was concerned about the amount of complaints that were being received, and of the time taken to deal with them. There was a need to look at the procedure again and focus more on serious complaints.

Miranda Carruthers Watt also expressed her concerns over some complaints which could be considered as vexatious and whilst there was no intention to stop complaints the complaint process needed to be looked at again, and she suggested that a joint report from the Police Crime Commissioner Office and Host Authority may be appropriate.

Resolved: That the update in relation to complaints be noted and that a joint report be submitted to the panel on the proposed changes to the complaints procedure.

6. Update from the Police and Crime Commissioner

The Commissioner presented a report to update the panel in relation to various ongoing areas of work including the Precursor Police Innovation Fund, Community Safety and Partnership Fund, Community Action Fund, Working with Communities as well as providing an update on performance.

In terms of the Precursor Police Innovation Fund, funding of approximately £216,000 had been secured from the first round of the innovation fund for a joint initiative with the County Council to create an early action response service. This would focus on mainstream resources into preventative work for vulnerable people and people with mental health issues.

It was reported that the full amount of Home Officer Community Safety grant of £1,794,000 for 2013/14 had been allocated (less £62) and of the £180,000 budget for Community Safety & Partnership £105,000 had been allocated.

In terms of the Community Action Fund, in November 2013 the Commissioner made a number of revisions to the Fund's Terms and Conditions to ensure that the focus was small, local community based groups to deliver projects at a local level. Following this a further press release was provided to media and local partners to promote and publicise the Fund. As at the end of December just under £35,000 has been allocated between 24 applications, leaving £15,000 still available in the fund. Approved applications have come from groups across the whole Lancashire- except for Pendle and Rossendale. The Commissioner had asked that these areas have additional information provided to their CSP's so that they could make sure local communities were aware of the opportunities.

Under the update on Performance the Commissioner reference was made to Partners concerns that the Constabulary was not dealing with volume crime and was focussed on more high risk matters. The Constabulary had not stopped dealing with the volume crime. There had been however, a shift in emphasis in that resources were directed towards risk in a far more effective manner. Rather than reacting to year on year and the year to date performance data, the Commissioner had agreed with the Chief Constable that the Constabulary now examined data which highlighted exception reporting and notable crime trends. This allowed more effective tasking process, where officers were able to deal with matters that really affected the community rather than reactively to localised crime spikes.

Work was currently ongoing in relation to an effective neighbourhood's initiative with the Constabulary to deliver targeted local policing in order to endure best use of resources and public reassurance.

The Commissioner was extremely concerned that the cuts imposed on police spending were having an adverse impact on the ability of the Constabulary to respond proactively to community concerns. Generally, performance was being sustained, although the Commissioner's Working Group identified a number of 'exception' reports relating to specific areas of crime which were outlined in the report submitted. The Commissioner had asked the Chief Constable to account for his actions in relation to these crime types. The Commissioner was satisfied with the Constabulary's direction of travel and was confident that the Chief Constable provided a thorough briefing in relation to each area of concern. The Commissioner had paid particular attention to areas where force performance in Lancashire appeared to be significantly different from that in other similar forces, a measurement used as a comparator.

The Commissioner would continue to monitor performance in line with the agreed framework and in support of the delivery of his Police & Crime Plan and discuss any deviations with the Chief Constable.

Various initiatives were underway in terms of working with communities, which included touring Lancashire in January gaining views from local people about the precept decision, visiting libraries, community centres, supermarkets and PACT meetings. In addition a 1400 strong telephone survey was undertaken supported by an online survey and a dedicated budget area on the website.

In November, the Commissioner supported Lancashire's aspiration to become a White Ribbon county by standing alongside the Chief Constable, Blackburn with Darwen Borough Council and Lancashire County Council to sign the pledge. Other events included working with BME communities on engagement with the Commissioner and raising awareness of Child Sexual Exploitation across the County.

The Commissioner discussed his report with Panel members and agreed to forward on a recent process release on the Community Action Fund. There was a discussion on red markers highlighted in performance data on crime types and which had been raised at Scrutiny meetings in September and December 2013 and the Commission reassured the Panel that these were being addressed and he would update the Panel on the progress of action identified to target these issues.

Resolved: That the update be noted.

7. PCC Budget 2014 /15

The Commissioner submitted a report which set out the latest financial position for the Police and Crime budgets in Lancashire and proposals in relation to the precept. The Police and Crime Commissioner had a statutory requirement to set an annual Police Crime budget and, as part of that process, to consult with the Police and Crime Panel regarding any proposals in relation to the council tax precept.

Included in the report was the current financial position including the changes in the level of resources, additional cost pressures reductions in the cost base and the identification of additional savings. The report set out:

- Strategic forecast for the revenue budget 2015/16 – 2017/18
- The revenue budget for 2014 /15
- Council tax proposal for 2014/15
- Capital Investment programme 2014/15

In addition the report set out the advice of the Commissioners Chief Finance Officer on the robustness of the budget and the adequacy of the level of reserves as required by section 25 of the Local Government Act 2003.

Over recent months the Commissioner, in consultation with the Chief Constable, had developed a 4 year financial strategy. The strategy has been based on information provided from central government regarding funding in future years together with assumptions on cost pressures including inflation and demand for services. From this the level of savings required to deliver a balanced budget had been identified and Commissioner and the Chief Constable had been working together to develop options to drive out further efficiencies and deliver more savings in future years. In October 2013, a

package of options that would deliver savings of £20.5m over the next 4 years was agreed by the Commissioner and steps were currently underway to implement these.

In developing options the Commissioner and the Chief Constable had looked to protect front line services as much as possible and drive out efficiencies wherever possible whilst maintaining service delivery. In total, £60.8m of savings have been agreed to date.

The savings identified to date, whilst significant, were still not sufficient to cover the current funding gap over the next 4 years and further options totalling £19.7m would need to be developed before 2017/18. With this scale of reductions still to come it was inevitable that some future options would impact on frontline service budgets. The actual level of savings required was dependent upon funding announcements and financial settlements. The Home Secretary had already announced that there would be further top slicing of police budgets in 2015/16 onwards for the IPCC and Police Innovation Fund and therefore the actual level of savings required was likely to be greater than that currently forecast.

The provisional police settlement was announced on 18 December. The settlement set out a funding of 4.8% compared to the anticipated 3.3% in recognition of the fact that police budgets were to be top-sliced to fund national developments. This announcement added a further £2.7m to the funding gap in Lancashire for 2014/15. The final settlement was expected to be announced in early February.

The report also set out cost pressures, savings proposals and reductions in costs. The cumulative impact of both an increase in costs and a reduction in funding meant that overall there remained a funding gap of £19.7m over the next 4 years. This is after savings of £20.8m had been achieved from the current budget process and £40m in previous years bringing the total level of savings required between 2011/12 and 2017/18 to £80.8m.

There were however a number of risks and uncertainties that would impact on the final position; which were the lateness of the Finalisation of the settlement, Counter Terrorism Grant Allocations and with several partners indicating that the funding may not be available from 2014/15 and therefore the final PCSO budget available would not be known until all partners had set their budgets.

As part of the budget setting process the Commissioner was required to consider whether or not to propose any changes to council tax. Limits on council tax increases were set by the Chancellor and were usually announced before or with provisional settlement. Any proposal to increase council tax in excess of the limit set by the Chancellor would require a public referendum the costs of which would need to be met by the Commissioner. No final announcement for 2014/15 has been made although it had previously been set provisionally at 2%. A final announcement was expected in February which was after the statutory deadline for Police and Crime Commissioners to consult with their Police and Crime Panels.

There was also the possibility that the Council Tax referendum level may be set at a lower level than that previously announced and therefore any final decision on council tax would need to take account of any final announcements from the Chancellor. The Government had also offered a council tax freeze grant equivalent to a 1% increase in council tax to those police bodies that freeze their council tax in 2014/15. For Lancashire this is equivalent to £0.722m. Increasing council tax by the provisional limit of 1.99% would

generate an additional £1.228m and was £0.506m more than was available from freezing council tax and accepting the freeze grant.

A series of roadshows had been held across the county to seek the views of residents on funding and council tax. Respondents were asked what level of council tax they would be willing to pay towards policing for 2014/15 and were provided with 3 options based on a cash freeze, a 2% increase and 5% increase. Overall results from the telephone survey show that three quarters (75%) of respondents were willing to pay an increased level of council tax overall with 37% willing to pay with 2% increase and 38% willing to pay the 5% increase. A quarter (25%) of respondents were not willing to pay an increased amount.

Given the strength of public support for a precept increase and the considerable gap in 2015/16 and future years it was recommended that council tax be increased up to the maximum that the referendum levels permit. Based on the current information this would mean a recommended increase in council tax 1.99% for 2014/15 and would generate income of £1.228m which would be used to bridge the funding gap in future years.

The Police and Crime Panel had the power to veto the proposed precept if at least two-thirds of the persons who were members of the panel at the time when the decision was made vote in favour of making that decision. If the panel vetoed the proposed precept, the report made to the Commissioner must include a statement that the panel had vetoed it.

There followed a discussion on the report where panel members debated the proposed precept, with views being expressed for and against the proposed precept.

Councillor Peter Gibson proposed an amendment that the precept should be frozen resulting in no increase, which was seconded by Councillor Ian Grant. Following a vote this amendment was lost.

Councillor Alistair Bradley proposed that the recommendation relating to the precept be amended to give the Commissioner authorisation to adjust the % increase to the limit set by the Government when announced. This was seconded by the Chair and following a vote this amendment was carried.

Resolved: That the Lancashire Police and Crime Panel:

- Noted the details of the 2014/15 police finance settlement and the overall impact on Lancashire's budget;
- Agreed the Commissioners precept proposal to increase the council tax precept up to the maximum allowed as part of the referendum limits to be announced by the Government in February, and noted that based on provisional limits this would see an increase of 1.99%, however the Commissioner is authorised to adjust this % increase to the limit set by the Government when announced.
- Would make arrangements to ensure that a formal written response to the proposals was sent to the Commissioner by 8 February 2014;

- Noted the availability of one resources and these be held in an Investment Fund and used to fund invest to save projects that will;
 - Improve productivity and visibility on the frontline;
 - Invest in IT equipment for officers to improve efficiency and reduce costs in the longer term; and
- Noted the level of uncertainty around some key strands of funding for 2014/15 and that the final information will be incorporated in the budget setting report that will be presented to the Commissioner in February in order to formally set the 2014/15 budget and council tax precept.

8. Urgent Business

There were no items of urgent business for discussion at the meeting.

9. Date of Next Meeting

The next scheduled meeting of the panel was scheduled for 11th February however as a result of decisions made in relation to the Budget, this meeting was no longer required.

The next scheduled meeting would take place on 7th April 2014 at County Hall, Preston, time and meeting room to be confirmed.

SignedChair
27th January 2014

