

Summary of the work of the Police and Crime Panel 2016-2017

Introduction by Cllr Steven Bowditch

“As the Carlisle City Council Representative on the Cumbria Police and Crime Panel I submit a review of the Panel’s work for 2016/17. My last report was for 2015/2016 on 31st March 2016.

As I stated at the last meeting of Community Overview and Scrutiny Committee that I attended, this is a very important committee. I have taken a full and active part. There have been five meetings since my last report. I have missed one, for family reasons. There are no subs for this committee. Since I was appointed to this committee and when it was first set up in 2011 I have missed I think only two meetings.

At the last meeting on Community I was asked questions that related to Policing in the City and various crime statistics. My role as a member of the PCP is with the rest of the Panel to hold the Crime Commissioner to account for delivery against his Crime Plan. Reports are given on crime figures for the County and I do ask quite specific questions that relate to Carlisle and District as well as the whole of Cumbria. However as last time if there are specific questions on this area I may well have to refer them to the PCPs Support Officer, Mark Clement, who helped in much of this report, for definitive answers. I will then give a written reply.”

Over the last twelve months the Police and Crime Panel has met four times to discuss a number of issues. This past year saw the election of a new Police and Crime Commissioner in Mr Peter McCall, and the Panel have worked with the Commissioner in the development of a new Police and Crime Plan to replace that of the previous Commissioner. The Panel has also confirmed the appointment of a new Chief Finance Officer, scrutinized the Commissioners council tax precept and looked at a number of other issues.

Police and Crime Plan (Discussed at every meeting)

One of the statutory responsibilities of the Panel is to hold the Commissioner to account for delivery against his Police and Crime Plan. The approach the panel has chosen is to receive thematic reports at every meeting on different elements of the plan. This provides the panel with the information they require to perform intelligent scrutiny, and support the commissioner in the development of appropriate services for Cumbria.

In July the panel discussed with the Commissioner his plans for the development of a new Police and Crime Plan. The Commissioner stated that his plan would build on the work of his predecessor, and not make wholesale changes, although there would be more focus on the issues that had been raised with him during the election. The Commissioner and Panel agreed to work together in the development of a new plan with updates brought back to future meetings.

In October the Panel reviewed the final Police and Crime Plan presented by the commissioner which highlighted as its objectives

- Correct Priorities Across Cumbria;
- A Visible and Effective Police Presence;
- Tackle Crime and Antisocial Behaviour;
- Ensure Offenders Face a Consequence for their Crime;
- Always Putting Victims First;
- Focus our Police on Online and Sexual Crime;
- Spending Your Money Wisely;
- Support Today's Young People

Members asked the Commissioner a number of questions about the Plan, and made suggestions as to its content and tone. The Commissioner promised to take these on board and a final version of the plan was circulated to members prior to publication.

One of the Commissioners key areas is restorative justice, and at the October meeting, Members were given an opportunity to receive a presentation from the chosen provider in Cumbria and the chance to ask questions. This resulted in a full discussion about the issue, as many members showed great interest and it was agreed that the panel would receive regular updates on the progress of this initiative.

Appointment of a Joint Chief Finance Officer

The purpose of the hearing was to review the Commissioner's proposed appointment of Chief Finance Officer, Mr Roger Marshall, following which the Panel would submit a report to him on it. The hearing focused on issues of the process followed, professional competence and personal independence.

The Panels main concern was that the creation of a joint Chief Finance Officer would create significant conflicts of interest in the post holder and impact on the relationship between the PCC and the Constabulary. Following discussions with the PCC, a number of safeguards have been put in place that went some way to alleviate Panel members concerns. Also the Panel will receive regular updates from the PCC on the progress of the new role and any issues that arise.

The Panel then asked Mr Marshall a number of questions relating to his professional competence and operational independence. At the end of the questioning Mr Marshall was given an opportunity to clarify any of his questions, add anything or ask the Panel questions.

Following the discussion with Mr Marshall the Panel moved into a closed session where they discussed the evidence they had heard, and then voted unanimously to confirm the proposed appointment, but reinforced their concerns about the independence of the post and the necessary safeguards required.

Council Tax precept (Discussed at Jan 2017 Meeting)

Item A.5

The Chief Constable presented a report which provided some context for the panel on the financial challenges faced by Cumbria Constabulary in balancing its budget in the main due to successive reductions in central government grant as efforts were made to address the national deficit. The Panel was briefed on the actions taken and planned by the Constabulary to make the required savings and the most recent Value for Money analysis which underpinned those plans.

The Panel considered a report from the Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner which provided an overview of the financial forecast for 2016-17 and an update on the financial monitoring performance of the Police and Crime Commissioner and Chief Constable against their respective budgets for the financial year.

Of great concern to Panel members has been the threat of a significant change to the funding formula. The PCC has agreed to keep panel members updated as to what effect any change may have, and we are expecting a further Government announcement in the coming months.

Other Issues

As well as standard items, the Panel also considers other issues as and when appropriate. Over the last twelve months this has included

- Complaints against the Police and Crime Commissioner
- Regular updates on the progress of the internal investigation into the reasons for the failure of the Poppi Worthington death
- The referral of the PCC to the IPCC for a speeding offence
- The payment of allowances to independent co-opted members of the panel
- The development of national policy and what this means in terms of future collaboration