

AT AN EXTRAORDINARY MEETING

of the

BEDFORDSHIRE POLICE AND CRIME PANEL

held on Thursday 19 August 2021 at 2.00pm
in the Council Chamber, Bedford Borough Council

PRESENT

Bedford Borough Council:	Councillors Caswell and Weir
Central Bedfordshire Council:	Councillors Bunyan, Dalgarno (Chair) and Graham
Independent Members:	P Downing (Vice-chair)

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Dodwell, Donelon, Nawaz and Saleem and Independent Member Mr Melville

Also Present: Police and Crime Commissioner Festus Akinbusoye

40. QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE CONSTITUENT COUNCILS AND MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC

There were no questions from Members of the Panel or members of the public.

41. MINUTES

RESOLVED

- 1) That the Minutes of the informal meeting of the Panel held on 4 August 2021 be confirmed to be signed by the Chair.

2) That the notes of the meeting of the Panel held on 10 August 2021 be confirmed to be signed by the Chair

42. DISCLOSURE OF LOCAL AND / OR DISCLOSABLE PECUNIARY INTERESTS

There were no disclosures of a local or disclosable pecuniary interest.

43. DRAFT POLICE AND CRIME PLAN

The Chair welcomed the Police and Crime Commissioner to the meeting. The Chair also referred to the launch of the draft Police and Crime Plan for 2021-2024 (the Plan), which had taken place earlier in the day and indicated that the launch had been well attended.

The Panel had before it for consideration the Commissioner's draft Plan.

The Police and Crime Commissioner took the opportunity at the start of the Panel meeting to apologise for his non-attendance at the previous Panel meeting, which had been due to a mis-understanding.

The Chair advised that the Panel would be reviewing a number of issues within the list of the Plan's priorities. He accepted that not all priorities could be delivered in the first year.

The Panel asked questions and made comments to the Commissioner on his draft Plan's priorities, and received responses, as follows:

1. Investment in community-based and community-led policing for urban and rural areas.

- Neighbourhood Schemes – supporting Speed Watch, Dog Watch, House Watch and other schemes to ensure residents were at the heart of Police activities.
- 1.4 Volunteers (Recruitment of Special Constables) – to support the engagement of community Special Constables who could focus on their local area (unless operational requirements deemed that they needed to be deployed elsewhere). There would be published key performance indicators (KPI) which would track progress over time. The Plan was a vision and provided a

general direction of travel. It was important that the Commissioner looked within his Force as well as to the community. Special Constables would be required across the County and not just rural areas. The present cohort was around 130 -140 Specials.

- In terms of the pressure on the Police to support the Special Constables and the Schemes as highlighted above, the Chief Constable was integral to, and supportive of, the draft Plan. The bigger issue at present was the lack of speed indicator devices, as used by Speed Watch. Therefore investment was being made to purchase 4/5 additional cameras.
- With regard to potential other frustrations from the Speed Watch volunteers, the Commissioner indicated that he would be happy to discuss the matter further outside the meeting. (The Chair commented that his Authority had allocated £20,000 to Speed Watch and he suggested that the Commissioner could liaise with the local authorities in the County about the extension of Speed Watch schemes.)
- 1.3 Access to policing services – this priority concerned the need to provide what residents wanted from the Police Service: being able to access the Police; having a good quality service; to feel safe in their communities. To respond to these needs, there would be investment in technology and have town centre locations where the public could upload reports of crimes and be able to obtain an update of a previously reported incident. (The Chair commented that the possible use of public libraries for these reporting points could be investigated.)
- The additional benefit in having volunteer Special Constables was that Police recruitment could be driven by this asset - It was known that the public appreciated having Police Officers and Specials who knew their area. It was not unusual for Specials to go onto becoming a Police Officer.
- The Commissioner agreed that to support the Neighbourhood Schemes, greater back office support was needed to assist the single Officer currently employed in the role of developing and supporting Watch Schemes.

2. Recruitment and retention of police officers

- The Tri-Force recruitment strategy was in place and although Human Resources (HR) was centralised in the Cambridgeshire Force, some HR work was carried out locally. There was experience to suggest that the recruitment of a Special Constable could take a year, which was too long. The challenges would be managed.
- With regard to exit interviews for Officers who had decided to leave the Force, these were always offered, although not always taken up. The data on reasons for leaving had already been requested. Attrition was high in the County when compared to the National position. The Police now informed potential recruits what they should expect of their police work and the shifts they would have to cover. However, no amount of training could prepare new recruits for the work they would have to undertake. If Officers could not be retained, this led to a huge waste of resources.

- It was really important to increase retention of Officers. Data on Recruitment and retention would be published quarterly on the website. (Comment: sometimes it was beneficial for an independent person to carry out an exit interview, as not everyone would welcome an interview with their Team Leader.)
- Other issues with recruitment were being considered such as how to support enquiries from ethnic minorities, as the current system excluded those without experience. The Commissioner was available to the HR Team to support the effort being made.
- With regard to Special Constables and the qualities they required to become Police Officers, the requirements were quite different. It was not unusual for a Special with 3 or 4 years' service to be able to become an Officer. A degree was not required, however all assessments needed to be passed. Experience was more important than a degree, in the opinion of the Commissioner. Discussions were on-going on this matter but it was hoped there would be more flexibility with recruitment in future.

The following comments and requests were made in respect of Priority 2:

- The support to ethnic minorities in recruitment was important.
- The Force had a "Purpose, Culture, Value" statement which could have been referred to in the draft Plan – if this was deemed to be important. Also, the "National Police Code of Ethics" could have been included, as this set out how Officers should behave.
- There would be other data to review – not just KPI's.
- Investigate why Officers were leaving the Force, including from what areas or teams that they were leaving from, in order to identify any common denominators – eg poor leadership/lack of support.

3. Tackling the causes of crime and breaking the cycle of re-offending

- 3.2 Interns and youth engagement – Public needed to know what Police powers were, including public rights with regard to "stop and search". There were often mis-understandings in this area, therefore this would be part of the programme. (Comment – the responsibility for young people in these issues should also be set out.)
- The Internships were paid positions and were for 18 – 24 year olds. Youth support generally stopped at age 18, therefore the initiative would be worthwhile. The intention was for one person from each local authority area in the County. The programmes would start with September, November and January cohorts. It was expected that the interns would aid interaction in the County. The interns would be placed WITHIN the OPCC. (Comment – the Youth Parliament was already in existence, which

included a cohort of potential future Leaders. It was suggested that this group was recognised in the Plan, as they already had a keen interest in being involved.)

- Re-offending rates were very high and offenders with addictive behaviour needed support and treatment. There was evidence that those people who completed a specific programme for re-offenders were 50% less likely to re-offend.
- The Commissioner was the National portfolio lead for Crime Prevention. There were many factors for youth crime: Poverty; Family breakdown; Learning difficulties; and bullying. The Commissioner was content to include a Public Health approach in the draft Plan.
- 3.4 Domestic Abuse – Bedfordshire Police was mindful of Domestic Abuse issues – another 6 – 7 Officers were being moved to this Team. (Comment – strong targets could be set in this area.)
- The conviction rate for cases of rape was nowhere near good enough and to hear the reports from victims was heart breaking. There would be resources available to ensure that these victims received all the support that they needed. A big concern was the backlog of cases in the Courts. Also, the longer the delay, the higher the drop out rate for proceeding to Court. (Comments – Bedford did not have a Court and victims often could not get to Luton. Also, they were concerned about going to Court to face their attacker – the system needed to be victim orientated.) Victim support services were being reviewed to include education of witnesses and providing options to be able to give remote evidence. It was unclear whether this was made clear to victims at an early stage, so it would be looked into.
- 3.5 Road Safety – In relation to any confusion between road related crime and accidents/collisions, driving while under the influence of drink or drugs was a crime and had been referred to in the draft Plan. Road Traffic Officers reported on the number of drivers who did not wear a seat belt, who drove over the speed limit and used a mobile telephone. The public could be informed about these dangers, so it was suggested that the reference was in the correct place in the Plan. (Comments – the text could be expanded upon to make the difference between road crimes and road accidents clearer; reference could be made to the potential for seizure of vehicles used in crime.)
- Commitment to Speed Watch – (Comment – nowhere in the County was part of a National trial with regard to the illegal use of electric scooters which were now prevalent and which lacked safety equipment – a direction from the Police on this subject would be appreciated.)
- 3.7 Next Steps programme – (Comment – suggest adding “for Bedfordshire” after “Direction”.
- 3.11 Violence Against Women and Girls – The Commissioner agreed to review the use of the phrase “more painful”.
- The Commissioner was asked to urge the Police Officers attending VAWG offences to most urgently consider the earliest possible arrests of suspects in line with National policy on Domestic Violence. Comment was also made on the need to ensure pro-active management and supervision of such instances.

4. Placing residents and victims at centre of policing priorities

- 4.4 Investigation focus / Protecting the Vulnerable – In terms of capacity of fully trained Detectives, it was acknowledged that the position was not where you would ideally want it to be. This was a real challenge – not just locally. The Ministry of Justice fund went direct to “Signpost Bedfordshire”, which was a statutory obligation. There were a good number of services available across the County, perhaps however, awareness of these was lacking. On this basis – for any commissioning, there was a requirement to produce a communication plan.
- 4.8 Child Sexual Exploitation – “I will ensure I have the right resources to support them and will work with partner agencies to ensure the same” (Comment made was in relation to what were the correct resources).
- 4.9 Ten Year Estate Plan – In relation to comments concerning the need for the Force to have to borrow to fund the capital programme and a strategy to off-set carbon, this was included in Priority 2 (Cleaner and Greener). It was acknowledged that this could be included in the Estate Plan. The Force would be considering its carbon footprint, including investigation into the use of electrically powered vehicles. (Comments – a holistic assessment of every aspect of the Force over 10 years was required; sustainability needed to be a part of every organisation’s business – long term plans were required.)

5. Multi-agency approach to community safety and crime reduction

- 5.1 Partnerships – With regard to how the Bedfordshire Force Plan matched up with other Forces, the Commissioner chaired the “Seven Force Partnership”. He indicated that the use of technology could be more efficient in policing. There was now more collaboration and the position overall was good. The draft Plan tailored to other Commissioners’ Plans.
- With regard to engagement with communities, one of the Commissioner’s attributes was meeting people. He had diary commitments to visit two schools every week. He had had several community engagements, including with town and parish councils. He had a strong focus on direct engagement, being aware that many residents did not use social media. It was important that residents could express their views to the Commissioner and that would continue.
- The Commissioner had had meetings with around 40/50 councils and he considered that these initial meetings were of an introductory nature.
- 5.5 A focus on Restorative Justice – Success rates with re-offenders was appreciable. The approach would be to encourage victims to engage with perpetrators, if they were happy to do so. There was a need to improve the process in order to ensure closure for the victim.
- 5.6 Working with our local educators – Discussions had taken place with the Education Diversion Team. The Commissioner was content to be joined by Councillors/ MP’s when attending schools in order to engage with young people.

6. Transparency and open communication

- With regard to Police contact telephone numbers for use by rural areas, there would be a requirement for all Forces to have a named Officer for communities. This was currently the case in Bedfordshire, however it was acknowledged that when personnel changed this was not always communicated.
- 6.1 Communication and Engagement Strategy – referring to the sentence “We will ensure there is adequate access to policing services across our communities.”, the Commissioner agreed to review the text to improve its substance. With regard to the sentence starting “We will communicate with the people of Bedfordshire....” and the result of a PCP Task and Finish Group which found that confidence in the police was low, the Commissioner suggested that communication was a two way process. The Police was going to introduce technology to enable crimes to be reported and for issues to be highlighted. This would also provide feedback on previous reports. The level of negative reports being communicated was a concern and on the other hand there was so much good work which was not reported. The narrative on communications was being improved. (The Chair commented that the Chief Constable had spoken of the high level of calls being received from the public and it was questioned as to the level of resource which could be invested to improve the system.)
- 6.2 Transparency – With reference to the “HMIC FRS Report on the super-complaint on policing and immigration status”, the Commissioner advised that this referred to him ensuring that the Chief Constable gave these issues due regard.
- Bedfordshire had in its locality: Yarlswood IDC; Toddington Services (hot spot for migrants being dropped off); and London Luton Airport, and these all presented a challenge. The Plan set out what the response to these tasks would be. Migrants were not the biggest concern in the County, however the Commissioner needed to be mindful, whenever there was potential harm to the public.

7. National contributions

- Responding to paragraphs 7.1 to 7.3, some people had experienced serious flooding over Christmas 2020 which was a disaster for them. In terms of collaborative working, this was met with varying degrees of enthusiasm, however overall, Partners realised the benefits which were derived. (NOTE – the Commissioner stated that he was aware of how voluntary organisations had responded to last year’s emergencies – the flooding across the County on several occasions, and the constant CV19 response and he promised to look into lessons learned in relation to working in multi-agency emergency scenarios – ensuring that the Police was fully prepared in advance for any future large scale emergency).
- With regard to references in the draft Plan to KPI’s/outcomes and any intention to revise the Plan over its three years, the Plan was currently for the present needs of the County and it would be reviewed where necessary.

- With regard to the funding formula, it was hoped that the Government would review this during the current Parliament and there would be a continued push for this. There might be a need to re-visit the Plan based on available resources.

RESOLVED

That that the above comments/responses be treated as the report and recommendations of the Panel in respect of the draft Plan and issued to the Police and Crime Commissioner to enable him to respond in accordance with statutory requirements.

The Chair thanked the Commissioner for his attendance and looked forward to seeing the published Plan.

The meeting closed at 3.47pm.