

Gloucestershire Police and Crime Panel Update – Tuesday 3 November 2021

The meeting focussed entirely on the recently issued PEEL report of Her Majesty's Inspectorate (HMI) of Constabulary and Fire and Rescue Services on the performance of the Gloucestershire Constabulary.

The Chair of the Police and Crime Panel noted that the report had been prepared based on a review undertaken before the appointment of the new Police and Crime Commissioner in May this year and asked for a constructive discussion.

The report was introduced by the Police and Crime Commissioner and commented on by the Police and Crime Commissioner and the Chief Constable of the Gloucestershire Constabulary.

The report assessed how good Gloucestershire Constabulary is in 13 areas of policing. HMI provided graded judgements in 11 of the 13 areas - 4 were graded good, 1 adequate and 6 inadequate.

Amongst the areas graded good were:

- preventing crime
- treatment of the public, and
- disrupting serious organised crime

Amongst the areas graded inadequate were:

- investigating crime
- recording data about crime
- protecting vulnerable people, and
- good use of resources

The Police and Crime Commissioner noted that HMI had based its report on data for the period September to November 2020.

Both the Police and Crime Commissioner and the Chief Constable acknowledged the findings of the report and committed that actions would be taken to address the problems identified. Both aspire to a Force that is outstanding in all areas of its operations and therefore to finding solutions and implementing those solutions.

Both noted that Gloucestershire had been subject to a new form of review, one that expanded the previous four areas of assessment to the new 13 pillars. In a previous report the Force had been found adequate across all four areas, but the new system was more granular and this had consequences for how matters were recorded and reported. It was also noted that HMI had very recently announced that the new basis of reporting was to be revised as certain problems had been identified.

The principal problem for Gloucestershire had related to failings in the Crime Data Integrity (CDI) system of the Force, the initial system for recording reported incidents. Both the Police and Crime Commissioner and the Chief Constable acknowledged that this was an area of concern, but noted that the inadequate rating across several of the 11 areas graded all flowed from this one deficiency and did not reflect a widespread failure in the performance of the Force taken as a whole.

The Chief Constable noted that the CDI system operated by Gloucestershire was at end of life and that a proposal for its replacement would be forthcoming. He also noted this was an area that the Force had been focussed on and that the previous external assessment in 2019 had rated it as 81% compliant, whereas the most recent report rated it 86.7% compliant. For context, 93% compliance has been rated “outstanding” for other forces and, prior to the pandemic, internal assessment at Gloucestershire Constabulary had them hitting 92%.

The Police and Crime Commissioner noted that resources had already been boosted to address the issues raised in the report based on sight of an earlier draft and the fact that the problems highlighted were already known. In particular the number of officers working in the Crime Recording Unit had been increased from 20 to 40 and was due to be increased further to 60. £2m of savings identified in the budget are being used to address the need for extra resources by recruiting an additional 103 staff for operational matters; this is separate from the 300 frontline officers that the Police and Crime Commissioner is seeking to add over the course of his term.

The Chief Constable noted that of the 77 specific cases where failings in the Police response had been identified in the course of the inspection, almost all have been subsequently fully addressed successfully without any significant consequences.

The Chief Constable noted that the report lacked context and that this was vital to understanding the position that the Force finds itself in. He specifically mentioned:

- Large numbers of staff had Covid in 2020, up to 197.
- Large numbers had also had to self-isolate for periods.
- The unprecedented demands that Black Lives Matter and other social unrest created.
- Issues with flooding and other exceptional events.
- The new issues that policing the enforcement of lockdowns and regional variations in restrictions created.
- The strains placed on the Force as the last line of defence when other services such as Social Care and Ambulance emergency services were impacted by COVID.

The Chief Constable also noted that the Force was currently dealing with much higher levels of emergency calls, something true across the country, and that we typically have nine missing persons reported a day, often as a result of rising numbers of elderly people with mental health issues.

Based on this context, whilst acknowledging the findings of the report, a number of Members expressed the view that the report was unfair and created an unwarrantedly negative impression of the performance of the Force.

The Police and Crime Commissioner was asked if he had confidence in the Chief Constable and his team and confirmed he did.

The Police and Crime Commissioner “accepted the report” and noted that “this is a problem that may not have happened on (his) watch, but the solution lies on (his) watch”.

QUESTIONS RAISED BY THE OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

After the formal meeting concluded, I followed up with the Police and Crime Commissioner, the Chief Constable and his staff on two issues raised by the Overview and Committee after my last report on the Police and Crime Panel:

How much time are the Police Horses being actively used?

The horses are very actively used, often six days a week, on both policing specific large events and in community patrols. They are, in the opinion of the Force, visible and have a positive, even “magical” impact in the community both in terms of actual operations and in terms of community relations. Nevertheless, their use and the for value for money they represent are being looked at as part of the review currently being undertaken.

Is the Police and Crime Commissioner satisfied with the vetting arrangements for officers following the Sarah Everard case; how is confidence of women in the police being addressed?

The Police and Crime Commissioner and Chief Constable acknowledged the concerns raised by the case, but both expressed confidence that the culture in Gloucestershire Constabulary was better than in most forces as regards this issue and that the existing arrangements to monitor recruitment and behaviour, including whistle-blower procedures, were adequate. Assistant Chief Constable also noted that additional training had been provided to officers recently to address the concerns raised by the case.