

Gloucestershire Police and Crime Panel (PCP) – 4 November 2022

Feedback Report to Tewkesbury Standards and Oversight Committee

Meeting attended by Councillor David Gray.

Ratification of new independent members

Two new independent members of the Panel, selected following interview by a sub-committee of the Panel, were welcomed to the Panel, Stella Tams, who has a background in adult education and fostering, and Kingston Myles, who is currently head of commercial development with English Heritage. They are classed as independent members as they do not represent local authorities in Gloucestershire.

Thanks were noted for the contribution to the Panel of the departing Panel member Martin Smith who had served on the Panel for a number of years.

Police and Crime Commissioner's update

The Police and Crime Commissioner (PCC) gave an update on activity across the Gloucestershire Constabulary.

The PCC noted his thanks to the departing independent member and welcomed the new members to the panel.

The PCC reported that Gloucestershire had won £2million in new funding for its Safer Streets program from the home office after a successful bid. This money will add to the £1million of funding already allocated to the scheme and will be focussed on activities designed to address anti-social behaviour, rural crime and violence against women and girls.

The PCC discussed a number of aspects of how the funds will be used, including additional drones to help with rural crime, drug testing machines and software, as well as additional staff.

Gloucestershire won the highest award on a £per head basis of any of the 43 forces in England and Wales, which reflects the effort invested. A number of other bids are pending.

Among other innovations, Gloucestershire was the first Force to use digital tracking to tackle dog thefts.

Gloucestershire has also instigated the Odyssey system that captures relevant data from sexual assault victim's phones rapidly, at the start of an investigation, so that the phone is not taken away from the victim. In the past the phone has often been taken for weeks as part of an investigation, which has been a further trauma for the victim when so many are dependent on their phones for contacts with friends and family.

The PCC gave an update on Operation Scorpion, an anti-drugs operation involving 5 forces in the South West. The operation will now target users and highlight the long term effects of drug use and the related societal costs of the trade in drugs.

The recent examples of organised protests involving disruption to business and the public were discussed. The PCC highlighted the recent protest in Gloucestershire at the Mueller milk plant by Animal Rebellion. The Gloucestershire Forces' response is to be "firm but fair". The MD at Mueller had complimented how the Force had handled the incident. In response to a question, the Deputy PCC highlighted that additional training had been offered to officers to help them deal with such situations. The PCC was clear that the right to protest must be protected as part of a balanced approach.

The PCC noted that phase 2 of the Community Speedwatch fund was now being rolled out. Phase 1 had seen some administrative issues, but the program to target persistent speeders is a good one.

The PCC had recently attended a meeting in Stroud on violence against women, and a "this ends here" march, both of which addressed a major problem we have currently in society, violence against women and girls. The PCC highlighted the need for clearer messaging from the police in respect to such crimes, referring to "a man attacked a woman" rather than "a woman was attacked". A national campaign to address misogyny and the need for all of us to take action, is currently being rolled out across media.

The PCC said he recently attended the first volunteer police course. He confirmed that recruitment of full time and other police officers was on track to meet his targeted uplift in numbers. The most recent entry course had 27 new recruits, the highest ever in the Force.

The PCC has met with the new Minister for policing and has, amongst other things lobbied for greater flexibility in recruitment. The PCC does not believe that a degree should be a necessity for recruitment to the police force. That requirement is a particular obstacle to recruiting ex-military, ethnic minorities and older candidates, many of whom would be valuable additions.

More speed enforcement vehicles are to be purchased.

The Force is still working to address the outcome from the last Peel Report inspection. Progress is being made, but more needs to be done, especially on recording crime and speed of response. A new change program is to be launched by early 2023 to improve the operations of the control room.

The PCC emphasised that changes in the force should be driven by data, with targets being set and monitored. The target for the PCC is to move the Force to an "outstanding" rating.

A question was raised about the response to the recent report that followed the Wayne Cousins case which , based on a review of 6 forces, highlighted problems with vetting in recruitment. Although the PCC noted that Gloucestershire was not one of the forces that had been reviewed, he absolutely accepted that vetting was a really important issue. He

said that he would rather delay recruitment than compromise on the integrity of the vetting done during recruitment. One means to improve the process was enhanced automation of checks, and there was work being done by Gloucestershire on a “proof of concept” around vetting automation. If successful, this could be shared with other forces.

In response to a question the PCC confirmed that he was aware that morale was fragile in the force and that officers were, not least thanks to the improvements in the recording of crimes, working under a heavy caseload. He said that the number of new officers being recruited would help to alleviate this problem over time.

On police pay the PCC welcomed the proposed £2000 flat increase being offered to all officers, as this targeted the limited funds available on those he believed were under the most strain, the younger officers. Other actions were being considered to help address the cost of living crisis, such as offering affordable accommodation for those attending training, reducing the need for expensive commuting.

Another new piece of technology that was coming soon was “operation snap” which facilitated the public uploading dashcam footage of road rage and dangerous driving incidents.

Police Contact and Complaints

A presentation was delivered covering the operation of the police complaints function within the police and the office of the PCC.

Nadine Farley-Turner, the Independent Review Officer and a highly experienced criminal lawyer, highlighted that the Policing and Crime Act of 2017 had only relatively recently been implemented and that the Act effectively meant that the public had the right to complain about any aspect of the operation of the force.

A new approach had been implemented to handle complaints which was far more user friendly, but more focussed on identifying improvements rather than punishment.

Of all the complaints handled by Gloucestershire PCC, 40% are dealt with by a call-back, 55% involved a referral to the professional standards department, which did not involve additional investigation beyond the initial complaints, and 5% a full investigation involving seeking additional evidence.

The vast majority of complaints are about failure to deliver a service, such as not answering a call, or doing so after only a long delay. A small number involved more serious matters such as the use of police vehicles or corruption, and only a tiny number serious breaches in conduct.

Overall the number of complaints is climbing nationally, perhaps as a result of access to greater electronic means of lodging complaints, as it is a trend seen in all service providers to the public.

In Gloucestershire the vast majority of complaints are dealt with through a call back. Usually people are only asking to be heard or have a situation explained to them. Many accept simple apologies where they are justified. In the last year 20 cases have been referred to Practice Review process, but only 1 has resulted in misconduct proceedings.

Complainants have 28 days to request a review of the outcome of their complaint.

Lisa Mann, the Contact and Complaints Officer in the Pcc's Office, highlighted the heavy volume of complaints received, but the often spurious nature of the complaints.

She noted that a lot of complaints occurred after the announcement of the precept set for the police. A lot of the correspondence is really just about asking for help, often from people with mental health issues, some serial complainants, and often about matters that are not relevant to the police, such as missed bin collections or disputes with neighbours. It is a fact that a full moon results in a large increase in contacts from the public. Many complaints relate to disputes over wills in families.

The PCC Office try and help wherever possible by referring people on to the correct other services, such as the Police Force itself, MPs or Councils.

Feedback was overwhelmingly positive to the service.

Report of the Chief Executive to the Office of the PCC

The newly appointed CE submitted her report and gave an update on the operation of the OPCC, including a breakdown of the funding allocated between various programs.

The overall report was positive, showing progress against targets. It was suggested that the use of "traffic lights" within the report conclusions would help to identify trends.

On the budget for the next year, a lot is dependent on the outcome of the spending review from the Treasury which is now due later in November. Ahead of that review the police are in the same position as many public bodies in not being able to conclude on a budget as the high level of inflation and wage settlements make budgeting uncertain.

The meeting concluded.

Councillor David Gray