

Gloucestershire Police and Crime Panel (PCP) – 7 July 2023

All materials from the meeting, including reports and presentations are available on the Gloucestershire County Council website.

A report from Superintendent Alistair Stenner was circulated, detailing the constabulary's activities relating to violence and intimidation against women and girls (VIAWG), largely in response to the recent Casey Report. Members were updated on a review of current allegations of sexual misconduct and other VIAWG matters; we were advised that twenty police officers and staff were currently suspended (a number which the Superintendent described as 'unheard of'); thirteen of those suspensions were of police constables.

The Superintendent acknowledged a significant increase in reports involving VIAWGs involving police officers and staff, and also that deadlines were being impacted by an ongoing national review of police regulations and also a lack of court capacity where prosecutions were being sought. The Constabulary had committed additional resources to the Police Standards Department which represented an uplift of about 20%. It was noted that the increase in reporting could be construed as positive as it represented a greater confidence in victims when considering whether to report VIAWG, as well as a change in culture that encouraged male officers to be "upstanders rather than bystanders". The substance of the allegations ranged from inappropriate comments to unwanted sexual touching; they were all related to people who were known by the alleged perpetrator.

All police constables had been briefed on the Casey Report and a recent seminar on misogyny, sexism, reporting VIAWG and 'call-out culture' was well attended by officers and staff. It was acknowledged that more work needed to be done and as a starting point focus groups were being organised, and a Supportive Leadership and Wellbeing course was being relaunched with specific attention paid to sexism. There is likely to be an inspection which will examine the constabulary's internal procedures relating to VIAWG.

A report from the Independent Custody Visitors (ICV) was circulated and its findings noted; of particular interest was the lack of cleanliness in external areas of the custody suite which was apparently the result of a contractual omission. Members were reassured that the Chief Inspector was seeking to have the cleaning contract amended to include the outdoor exercise yards.

Clarification was sought about the number of young people in custody; while 504 under-17s were in custody between April 2022 and March 2023, the average time spent by young people in custody was 5.73 hours, regarded as a suitable length of time. It was noted that while arrests were on average increasing, the length of time in custody was decreasing – indicative of more efficient processing of prisoners.

The number of ICVs – 21 – was regarded as sufficient but recruitment was ongoing with particular emphasis on diversity in age and ethnicity.

The Annual Report of the Police and Crime Commissioner was noted.

An update was received from the Joint Internal Audit panel. Attention was drawn to the lateness of the accounts which were not prepared until March; members were told that staffing problems as well as a wide issue with public sector accounting (the Panel noted that 50% of public sector accounts were incomplete). A member asked why the external auditor had been appointed, given they lacked experience in auditing large public sector bodies; we were advised that the auditor is appointed by the Public Sector Audit Board and it had been difficult to secure the interest of larger firms.

The Police and Crime Commissioner updated the panel on his activities over the past few months.

The Chief Executive of the Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner presented her report, the contents of which were noted. Attention was drawn to a spike of 164% in complaints received by the OPPC in May 2023; this was attributed to a letter-writing campaign by anti-hunting activists. The crime overview of the past twelve months made for depressing reading, showing increases in crime generally and specifically in eight areas (homicide, robbery, public order offences, racially/religiously aggravated offences, sexual offences, violence with injury, violence without injury, and violence against women and girls). However, members were advised that a new reporting system would account for a large part of the increase and that the figures would plateau soon; nevertheless, the Commissioner acknowledged an unprecedented demand for police services over the last twelve months. Members were updated on the appointment of a Volunteer and Engagement Officer who would work facilitate communication between the police and residents. Of particular note was that the post involved a 'Councillor Advocacy Scheme', first trialled in Devon and Cornwall; this scheme will see representatives from parish, town, district, and borough councils meet with representatives from the police and Community Safety Partnerships every quarter raise issues on behalf of their council's communities and allow the police the opportunity to provide updates which councillors can take to their councils.

The panel also held a confirmatory hearing for the appointment of a Chief Finance Officer. The Commissioner briefly covered the interview process which saw three of six candidates interviewed, and the preferred candidate introduced themselves and fielded questions from the panel. The panel then closed the meeting to the public and discussed the appointment. The outcome would be reported shortly.

The meeting concluded; the Minutes would be published on the County Council website. The next meeting is to be held at 10:00am on 8 September.