

Police and Crime Panel – 6 February 2023

The agenda and papers for this meeting can be found at <https://glostext.gloucestershire.gov.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=650&MId=11496&Ver=4>

Prior to this meeting, I and other Panel members attended a briefing relating to the budget. The majority of that briefing was also mentioned on this Agenda but of note is that a survey of each district in the county revealed that only 32% of people across the county believed that the Gloucestershire Police is sufficiently funded – this was most pronounced in Cotswold District where 72% felt that the police were under resourced. However, 89% of people are satisfied or very satisfied with police performance. An overwhelming majority of people said that more Police Officers were needed. A question was asked at the Panel about whether more visible policing was a priority; the Chief Constable remarked that the Police would love to do more neighbourhood policing but the pressures of policing that was not visible by the public made doing so difficult.

Budget

The recommendation of the Police and Crime Commissioner's Office was that the Panel approve an increase of 4.41% on the Council Tax precept. The Commissioner remarked that this was a difficult budget, reflecting the challenging economic times in which we find ourselves. The detail of the budget proposal can be found in the papers at the link above. Of note is that the Constabulary's reserves are significantly depleted, although they are not solely being used to prop up the budget (much of it is being invested into the fleet, new technology, etc) – the total reserves are at £20 million in 2024 reduced to £7.7 million by 2028 (see Paragraph 5.11 of the Report). Members noted that the Police were still suffering from underfunding from central government and that local government was picking up the pieces. The Chief Constable noted in his report that, from 2025/26 onward, efficiencies would need to be made – my impression is that resources are still not up to comfortable levels and despite the increase which the Panel approved the significant pressures faced by the Constabulary are not being reduced, but coped with.

The Chief Constable gave a brief overview of the operational situation and the context with which the budget was being set. Of note:

- 180 new Police Officers have been recruited through the central government uplift and subsequent efforts by the OPCC.
- A replacement intelligence and crime system (NICHE) will come into effect in May 2025.
- A PEEL report will be published in March; other constabularies are dropping grades but Gloucestershire is improving. The Constabulary has risen to 19th place out of 44 Police forces for call handling (which was identified as an area of concern by the Inspectorate).
- Response officers are still under resourced; the science suggests that 47 officers are required for every shift but there are only "38 officers on a very good day".
- Much Police work is not necessarily related to crime; around 8 missing persons a day are reported to the Police. 5,000 incidents last year were primarily mental health concerns.
- National shortage of firearms officers and detectives.
- 209 officers were attacked in Gloucestershire last year.
- Last year there were 32 requests for aid from other constabularies – three were refused on the basis of insufficient staff in the county.

The Perceptions of Crime survey was presented by the Commissioner and can be viewed in full at the above link. Of interest to us in Tewkesbury Borough is that:

- Only 63% of people in the borough feel safe outdoors after dark (compared to 74% in Cotswold District and 47% in Stroud District); however, 95% of people in the borough feel safe at home during the day and 87% feel safe at home during the night. Across the county many people did not feel safe using social media or banking online (74% and 62% respectively for Tewkesbury Borough). “Vehicle related nuisance” (26% of people in the borough ranked this as “a very big or serious problem”) was ranked as the top concern in Tewkesbury Borough, very closely followed by “people using/dealing drugs” (25%). Interestingly young people and people from lower economic backgrounds were more likely to view people using and dealing drugs as a serious problem.
- 64% of people in the borough feel that there is “a strong sense of community” – the third highest in the county after Cotswold and Stroud Districts.