

GLOUCESTERSHIRE POLICE AND CRIME PANEL

MINUTES of a meeting of the Gloucestershire Police and Crime Panel held on Friday 7 July 2023 at the Cabinet Suite - Shire Hall, Gloucester.

PRESENT:

Cllr Ray Brassington	Cllr George Porter
Cllr Philip Burford	Cllr Steve Robinson (Chair)
Cllr Joe Harris	Cllr Brian Tipper
Cllr Sajid Patel (Vice-Chair)	

Virtual attendance: Cllr Flo Clucas

Apologies: Cllr Collette Finnegan, Kingston Myles, Cllr Martin Percy and Stella Tams

1. ELECTION OF CHAIR

Cllr Steve Robinson was elected as Chair for the year 2023/24.

2. ELECTION OF VICE-CHAIR

Cllr Sajid Patel was elected as Vice-Chair for the 2023/24 year.

4. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

The minutes of the previous meeting were approved as a correct record.

5. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

No declarations of interest were received.

6. VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN AND GIRLS (VAWG)

6.1 The Chair invited Superintendent Alastair Stenner, Head of Professional Standards at the Constabulary, to present this report. Members noted the following points:

- Following the Baroness Casey Review into standards of behaviour and internal culture of the Metropolitan Police Service and understanding how that translated across into other police services, a number of key pieces of work have occurred nationally and internally within Gloucestershire Constabulary.
- His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services (HMICFRS) had produced a list of 43 recommendations, which every professional standards department in the country was charting progress against. As well as internal processes, there will be an external inspection from HMICFRS on this.
- Gloucestershire Constabulary currently had 20 members of the organisation suspended from duty, which was approaching unheard of levels for the Force. 13 of the 20 members of staff had been suspended for VAWG related matters. There was an equitable balance between officers and staff within these members, they were a range of ages and within a range of roles in the Constabulary.

- These individuals had been suspended on the grounds that there could be a case of gross misconduct and the Professional Standards Department (PSD) were currently working through how these cases would be progressed. The type of behaviours reported ranged from inappropriate language to inappropriate physical contact.
- The numbers of those suspended were believed to be in proportion with other constabularies in the country. Following the Baroness Casey Review, constabularies had worked hard internally to try and create a 'call it out' culture and give confidence to those who needed to report such behaviours. Increased reporting was therefore seen as a good sign as officers/staff were beginning to feel more confident that if they speak up, they would be supported.
- Superintendent Stenner noted that a national review of police officer regulations that governed discipline was due and that, Gloucestershire would be part of the group being consulted on these changes.
- Gloucestershire Constabulary ran an internal report on culture and VAWG related issues in January 2022. As a result of this commissioning, a series of recommendations had been produced, identifying the issues and areas of improvement for the Constabulary. Again, there would be progress monitoring against these recommendations.
- The Chief Constable and Deputy Chief Constable had also invested increasing amounts of time engaging in staff networks, having up front discussions about trust and confidence in the Constabulary's processes and procedures.

Questions

- 6.2 A member shared their concern of the difficulties being encountered by women who were seeking to report issues to the police, so much so that they were not proceeding to do so. A particular scenario was highlighted of during Cheltenham Race week where women had reported feeling unheard by the police. It was highlighted that this often related to the quality of service the public received when reporting crimes. There were unfortunately examples of complaints specifically related to reporting VAWG issues where women had been met with attitudes that had translated to not feeling believed, understood, or being dealt with in a timely manner. There was also an ongoing issue of women not trusting police officers in their job (for example being stopped and not feeling safe in that situation).
- 6.3 Members were reminded that this item was focused on internal VAWG issues, and a future item could be scheduled to look at the Constabulary's external response. The Commissioner shared that there were a huge range of things being done externally including the launch of the Flare App, Operation Soteria, bystander training, speaking to young people about consent etc. There was always room for improvement, but the Force was putting in a huge amount of work to improve its legitimacy and their relationship with the public.
- 6.4 It was noted the importance of language used in this area. It was important for the police to ensure the use of appropriate, accurate, honest, transparent, and respectful language in their external communications to the public. Overall, there needed to be a greater level of empathy for victims who were reporting such sensitive crimes.
- 6.5 Noting a reference to an increase in resources, a member sought clarity on where this was. It was confirmed there had been a 20% increase in investigating staff for this area, including an uplift of posts within vetting and the anti-corruption unit.

- 6.6 In relation to the 13 officers/staff who were currently suspended for VAWG related issues, it was advised that officers would expect to see a continued increase in the medium term, as confidence was built within the Force that victims would be believed and supported. Overtime the numbers suspended should plateau as the improvement work took hold. The vast majority of the 13 suspended at the moment involved behaviour towards a work colleague, there were no cases of VAWG related behaviour between a police officer and a stranger/vulnerable victim. All offences had taken place recently and none were of a historical nature at the moment.
- 6.7 Members also heard that all cases were individuals who were either new to the Force or were in mid-service. The Commissioner noted that there was a preconceived view amongst many that perpetrators of VAWG offences often tended to be older men who had grown up without the education men had today on these issues, however many charities and partners had identified an issue within younger men, noting the major influence social media was having on their attitudes and behaviours.
- 6.8 Listening to the discussion today, a member reinforced that the vast majority of police officers were hardworking and diligent people, they did not perceive an institutional problem in the Force but rather with society as a whole. They felt confident that the Force were doing everything they could to remove this small number of individuals who had no place in policing.
- 6.9 A member raised the importance of working with children and young people in this area, particularly so to combat the impact of social media. The team advised that there were various initiatives ongoing in schools. The [Consent](#) video for primary school age taught children how to borrow and lend, and the meaning of yes and no from a young age. Boost was a project in senior schools to help teach respect. There was also a longer term need to address the way the court system responded to enable a young person to change their behaviour, rather than criminalising and making said behaviour permanent and entrenched.

7. INDEPENDENT CUSTODY VISITORS ANNUAL REPORT

- 7.1 This report was taken as read and the Chair opened up to the Panel for questions.
- 7.2 It was advised that about 5 years ago, there were only 8 Independent Custody Visitors (ICVs) in Gloucestershire. A lot of work had been done to increase the number, as well as the diversity of volunteer. The now 21 ICVs were about the right number for the number of custody suites Gloucestershire had, it ensured that visits were carried out regularly. It was difficult to compare the resource to other forces as it would entirely depend on the number of suites. Nationally most ICVs were older and white, Gloucestershire had done a lot to proactively engage with different communities to try and improve diversity.
- 7.3 There were 50 custody cells available in Gloucestershire, it was up to the ICVs who they wanted to speak to, but they could be asked to prioritise certain people, for example, women and children. It would be incredibly rare that all the cells were in use at the same time.

- 7.4 The report summarised that there were 500 young people under the age of 18 in custody last year, and a member questioned how long on average they were spending there. It was stressed that bringing young people into custody was avoided as much as possible but when it did happen, the data showed on average young people spent 5.73 hours there. Increased times were often due to being unable to identify a secure place for their release. Positive work was being achieved to reduce time spent in custody across the board and the police were processing detainees much faster than last year. There was also work ongoing to make custody suites more child friendly.
- 7.5 A member asked whether the vulnerable detainees' data could be expanded to include areas such as medical and mental health so there was a wider understanding of the range of people being kept in custody. Officers confirmed they had access to this data and would provide it to the Panel. The OPCC, with partners, funded healthcare provision within custody which included mental health support and drug and alcohol referral case workers. The custody programme was assessed nationally through a quality assurance framework and Gloucestershire were considered as gold status for its scheme, it had been nationally recognised as one of the best and the team were keen to pursue achieving platinum status.

ACTION: Ruth Greenwood

- 7.6 Members heard when ICVs were selected for the scheme, they received appropriate training and vetting. The only subgroup who had to receive higher vetting were those able to visit detainees under the Terrorism Act due to specific legal requirements. Volunteers were from all different backgrounds, they would never know why someone was in custody as it was not relevant for their role, which was to ensure dignity and rights for those being detained.

8. POLICE AND CRIME COMMISSIONER ANNUAL REPORT

- 8.1 The Commissioner introduced the report and advised that it reflected the incredible hard work and productiveness of the OPCC team, outlining huge range of initiatives in all areas.
- 8.2 In relation to the Cheltenham Festival, it was noted that the Commissioner had worked with a range of partners including the Borough Council, Racecourse owners and stakeholders to give sufficient attention to the management of the Festival, particularly so when attendees were travelling between the Course and the town centre. As a result, improvements were put in place for the 2023 Festival which included; more public toilets, better management of transport, management of the electric scooters scheme, a new marshal system and more police visibly on duty to discourage anti-social behaviour (ASB). The new Deputy Chief Constable was an expert in the area of managing the safety of large events.
- 8.3 It was advised that ASB was a real problem for the county, Gloucestershire had the 6th highest rate in the whole county and it had been an issue for many years. Referring again to the Commissioner's public health approach to crime, half of his Commissioner's Fund had been spent on youth related activities, noting that nationally over the years there had been a lot of cuts in

this area. There had also been an escalating amount of resource going into dealing with ASB, particularly using the national Safer Streets funding that had been successfully secured by the OPCC team over 5 tranches.

- 8.4 A member also made reference to Solace which was a multiagency approach to tackling medium to high risk ASB with a team of experienced caseworkers and police officers. It had been operating in Gloucester and Cheltenham for a number of years and was now extending out to the rural communities. There was also the Community Trigger programme, which had been funded through Safer Streets, and provided an opportunity for residents to request a case review, again with multiple agencies, where they had experienced 3 or more ASB incidents within a 6-month period.
- 8.5 Concern was raised that the Annual Report only made reference to the 'good news stories', and whether it should also recognise the ongoing work to get Gloucestershire out of special measures. The comment was understood and would be considered for the next report.
- 8.6 The Committee were reminded that this report was focused on activity of the OPCC, rather than operational policing matters which officers urged members to report to their neighbourhood policing teams or raise with their local Community Safety Partnerships.

9. GLOUCESTERSHIRE CONSTABULARY AND OPCC JOINT INDEPENDENT AUDIT COMMITTEE - ANNUAL REPORT

- 9.1 Mike Nadin, member of the Audit Committee, presented this report. The Panel noted the following:
- The Audit Committee had been around for a long time. Its original role was to ensure money was being dealt with appropriately and not wasted. In recent times however, this role had extended to an emphasis on assurance, looking at risk to an organisation and what was being done to manage or mitigate said risks.
 - All public sector bodies were statutorily required to have an Audit Committee to provide financial oversight and clarity on risk management. For example, if the IT systems were compromised, what was in place to minimise the potential damage. Private sector companies were also strongly encouraged to have one.
 - Today's report described what that Audit Committee had done in the previous financial year 2022/23. It was added that a standing item on the Committee's agenda was to hear about the progress made towards recovery of the Force out of special measures, and to ask questions to gain assurances on this.
- 9.2 A member questioned why the final accounts had not been prepared until August 2022. It was advised that public sector accounts were extremely complicated, and an awful lot of work and technical skill was needed to

compile them. There were ongoing staffing issues, nationally, both in public sector finance departments but also within auditor firms. Both of these areas had impacted on the completion of the Force's accounts.

- 9.3 There was concern as to why tender for Bishop Fleming was accepted, noting from the report that they did not appear to have any experience of large public sector organisations. It was advised that appointment of public sector external auditors was done by a national Board. Gloucestershire did make representations against the decision, but they would have carried little influence. It was added that a lot of big auditor firms were declining to tender for public sector contracts due to the mentioned staffing issues, as well as the limited financial reward compared to private contracts.

10. UPDATE FROM THE POLICE AND CRIME COMMISSIONER (PCC)

- 10.1 The Commissioner shared the following highlights from his report:

- The OPCC hosted an excellent Restorative Justice Conference in April. This remained an important priority for the Commissioner in helping to reduce reoffending in the county.
- The Constabulary had won an international award recently for Odessey. This was a piece of technology that removed the need for victims of VAWG to give their mobile phones to the police for many months following an offence for evidence gathering.
- There continued to be a focus on rural crime. Safer Streets funding had allowed the OPCC to invest in various things such as poacher blocks, which could be placed outside key farm gates to prevent break ins, to help reduce rural crime.
- In addition, there will be installation of rural ANPR cameras to help monitor and identify offenders/suspicious individuals moving around rural roads. It was confirmed the location of these could not be shared.
- Safer Streets funding had been used to fund the production of a video highlighting stalking behaviour. It was aimed at making people think about how they approached a failed relationship, for example, and educating the public on stalking behaviours.
- Operation Scorpion was now in its 5th cycle of activity, which was targeting cannabis factories and its associated modern slavery issues across the southwest. So far, 67 arrests had been made and £7m worth of cannabis seized, as well as weapons etc. Drugs was often at the core of a majority of crime and the Commissioner was very pleased what the Constabulary was achieving in this area.

- 10.2 It was queried whether the Commissioner supported the introduction of a legally regulated market for cannabis as part of the solution. He confirmed that he did not agree that legalising cannabis would provide the solution some people think it would. He acknowledged there were a whole range of arguments to and for such a move, but saw no evidence in areas that had made this change of any improvements. The Combating Drugs Partnership in Gloucestershire supported a public health approach to those caught using

cannabis by offering an out of court disposal framework, supporting them to access services and address their addiction, rather than criminalising the behaviour.

- 10.3 A member also raised the increasing problem with young people using Nitrous Oxide canisters, both in terms of the medical impact it can have but also the resulting ASB behaviour. It was noted that the Government was reviewing a change in the law to give police more powers in this area, it was only currently illegal to sell it.
- 10.4 Noting the Government had recently announced its ASB [Action Plan](#), a member questioned whether Gloucestershire would be a pilot area for any of the new policies. It was advised that regionally Dorset was the area trialling both the additional patrols in hotspot areas and the new policy of immediate justice for victims of ASB, they had been given a financial enhancement to do so. It was understood the Action Plan would be rolled out nationally from next spring.

11. OFFICE OF THE POLICE AND CRIME COMMISSIONER - CHIEF EXECUTIVE REPORT

11. Ruth Greenwood, Chief Executive, presented this item. The report was taken as read and the following points highlighted:
- The first graph showed a huge spike in contacts during May this year. This was due to a concerted effort by a pressure group around a particular issue. This was something that happened from time to time and was out of the OPCC's control, but the team continued to respond to every contact received.
 - The staffing update at 4.2 of the report outlined the recruitment of a Volunteer and Engagement officer. Annie was in attendance at today's meeting and would lead on supporting OPCC volunteer groups (such as the ICVs previously discussed) and also provide that link between councillors, councils, and the constabulary. There would be 8 regional meetings a year across the different policing areas, attended by the OPCC and neighbourhood policing teams, to provide a forum for communication and information sharing. The future aim would be to establish an advocate within each parish/town council to improve the flow of information between the police and their councils.

ACTION: Share Annie's contact information with the Panel

- 11.2 A member raised that Cheltenham Borough Council had regular meetings with the local parish councils and it would be useful for Annie to attend one of those meetings.

ACTION: Democratic Services

- 11.3 A member asked for further information about the Turnaround project mentioned at 4.22 of the report.

ACTION: Ruth Greenwood

- 11.4 It was noted that the Table 4 in the report showed general trends on crime levels that were either in the red or only just in the green. The Panel were reminded that a big part of HMICFRS's decision to put Gloucestershire Constabulary in special measures was due to crime reporting not being good enough. Improvement in this area inevitably meant crime numbers would go up, particularly in areas such as public order or violence without injury which historically would have not been recorded separately, if it was connected to a more serious crime.
- 11.5 This data did not necessarily mean the county was less safe, but it was simply better at recording, and in some respects, it was a better indication of reality. Officers could not predict when these numbers would plateau but it was understood that there had been a high level of accuracy in recording crime (into the 90%) for some time now which should begin to reflect in the data. It was added however that regardless of work to improve in this area, nationally there were unprecedented highs for policing at the moment, so there would still be some level of increase in service demand.

12. WORK PLAN

- 12.1 There was a request for an update on the Solace scheme, it was confirmed this would be added to the Safer Gloucestershire update in September.
- 12.2 In relation to the twice-yearly item on the HMICFRS Improvement Plan, it was confirmed that PEEL (police effectiveness, efficiency and legitimacy) had started its next inspection which was due to report by spring 2024. It was agreed that more regular updates on the improvement journey would be provided to Panel, in addition to the main items in March and September each year.

ACTION: Democratic Services/Ruth Greenwood

- 12.3 Following today's item on internal police VAWG issues, a member requested that an item on the police approach to external VAWG was scheduled for November. It was confirmed officers would discuss proposed areas to cover within this, ensuring work was not duplicated from earlier items.

ACTION: Democratic Services/Kirsten Fruin

- 12.4 A member raised concern about the use of personal electric vehicles (scooters and bikes) in their local area. Members were urged to take specific issues up with their Community Safety Partnerships who provide a platform of partners who had statutory responsibility for crime and disorder. Officers

Minutes subject to their acceptance as a correct record at the next meeting

would also provide some generic information around policies and approaches.

ACTION: Ruth Greenwood

CHAIR

Meeting concluded at 12:55.

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