

North Yorkshire County Council

Police, Fire and Crime Panel

Minutes of the meeting held on Thursday 21 February 2019, commencing at 10:30am in the Grand Meeting Room at County Hall, Northallerton.

Present:-

Councillors: Val Arnold (Ryedale District Council), Michael Chambers MBE (Harrogate Borough Council), Mel Hobson (Selby District Council), Carl Les (North Yorkshire County Council, in the Chair), Russell Lord (Richmondshire District Council), Chris Steward (City of York Council), Sandra Turner (Scarborough Borough Council), Peter Wilkinson (Hambleton District Council).

Community Co-opted Members: Santokh Singh Sidhu and Paula Stott.

Julia Mulligan (Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner).

Chief Constable Lisa Winward (North Yorkshire Police).

Officers from the Office of the Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner: Fraser Sampson (Interim Chief Executive Officer), Michael Porter (Chief Financial Officer), Will Naylor (Deputy Police and Crime Commissioner).

Officers from NYCC: Suzanne Truman (NYCC Finance), Diane Parsons (Panel Secretariat).

Copies of all documents considered are in the Minute Book

360. Apologies

Apologies had been received, and were noted, from Councillor Ashley Mason.

361. Minutes

Resolved –

That the Minutes of the meeting held on 5 February 2019, having been printed and circulated, be taken as read and be confirmed and signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

362. Declarations of Interest

No declarations were made to the Panel.

363. Public Questions or Statements to the Panel

A question had been submitted to the Chair and agreed in advance of the meeting from Ms Gwen Swinburn, as follows:

Thank you Chair. I, like everyone I know, am extremely supportive of the police, particularly frontline officers. Accordingly I am predisposed to support a significant rise in my precept.

However a 10% rise is massive and a rise of that scale should have a proper business case, outcomes framework and so on.

That is why I am grateful that at your last meeting you rejected the precept. I wanted to congratulate you on your minutes and decision record.

I submit to you that the PCC has not met my most minimal expectations in her revised precept submission.

The PCC continues to misrepresent the minimal consultation she undertook. 63% of us agreed to a no or small rise. However on that basis she argues, disingenuously, that the consultation supported her much larger increase.

That was, and is, a trust and confidence issue to me.

The PCC still has made no effort to account for the £7.3m savings she promised to make over 3 years from last April. She merely informed you that 'substantial progress has been made' & now we hear posts are held empty. Her report gives little confidence savings will be achieved so will we simply be paying for unmet savings?

As the PCC keeps telling you, she demands that the Chief Constable submits business cases for her projects, yet all you are provided with is this. It does nothing to position you to make a decision in my view.

No evidence of savings, no proper justification for the skeleton proposals she puts forward, no plan, no outputs, no outcomes. All we really know is how many officers the PCC aspires to recruit. Chair, where else could such a trite case be made for such a massive increase?

I have no confidence in her abilities to act strategically.

Finally I look at the PCC's extravagant spending on luxury hotels & expensive train fares. I saw she spent nearly £1000 in 8 weeks on her tax payer funded credit card. In addition to her 17 staff she is now recruiting a new £80k Chief of Staff and a £115k plus all the trimmings new administrator. This is all money that should be going on the front line.

My question Chair is:

Can the Panel truly have confidence in the PCC's respect for public purse, based on either her first or second precept submissions?

The Commissioner was invited to comment. A detailed breakdown of hotel expenses incurred had been passed to the Panel in advance of the meeting and the Commissioner advised that her average hotel spend was £150 per night. The Panel were informed that the Commissioner seeks best value for each booking but that it is difficult to find anything below £170 per night in London where she is regularly required to stay. Councillor Wilkinson highlighted that from his own experience of business visits to London, the Commissioner's hotel expenses did not appear to be out of the ordinary. Paula Stott offered to provide details of a company which could possibly secure cheaper rates.

A number of statements in relation to the precept setting had been submitted to the Secretariat, and shared with the Panel, from Mr P Richardson, who was not present at the meeting to ask the Panel a question. It was agreed that Michael Porter would review this correspondence and respond to Mr Richardson where appropriate.

A question was also submitted in advance to the Panel from Mr Neil Wilby, as follows:

Good morning, Chair, Members, Commissioner, members of the public and fellow members of the fourth estate.

Thank you Chair for allowing this question and grateful thanks, also, to the Secretariat for their kind assistance in framing the question so that it complies with the Panel's guidance.

In the light of the Panel's recent concerns around lack of compliance in the Civil Disclosure Unit, do the Panel feel that the Commissioner, when setting her precept, should be earmarking further resources to ensure the improvements promised by the PCC?

By way of response, Councillor Wilkinson highlighted that the Panel had considered in some detail the issue of compliance within the Civil Disclosure Unit at the January 2019 Panel meeting but that it would not be the Panel's role to ask the Commissioner to specifically earmark funding. He advised that the issue of compliance will be revisited in six months' time. The Commissioner also reiterated her offer for Panel members to visit her offices and meet her staff.

364. Police precept proposal 2019/20: revised proposal for review by the Panel

Considered –

The Commissioner's proposal to set the policing precept for 2019/20 at £255.77 for a Band D property, thereby representing an increase of £22.95 over the 2018/19 level.

Fraser Sampson confirmed the statutory process going forward inasmuch as the policing budget will not be set until the end of February 2019, after the precept has been set, and that therefore the budget cannot be considered in detail prior to the scrutiny process being completed. The Commissioner wished to emphasise for the Panel that the Chief Constable has operational independence in how funding is spent. As such, by putting uplift into the Commissioner's Policing Priorities Fund, the Commissioner is better able to hold the Chief to account in ensuring that the funding is directed towards boosting the frontline.

Members confirmed that they had been clear in their understanding of the budgetary principles and independence of the Chief Constable but felt that this would not give reassurance to the taxpayer and there was a concern that public expectations are met.

Members welcomed that further detail had been provided by the Commissioner ahead of the meeting held on 21st February, in response to their statutory report and the recommendations therein.

However, some concerns and anxieties were raised within the discussions regarding both the execution and effectiveness of the Commissioner's plans, as well as the actual level of the precept proposed.

Members expressed their concern that the public would need to see a visible difference to neighbourhood policing as a result of the uplift and Commissioner's plans. The Chief Constable acknowledged these concerns and sought to reassure the Panel and public that funding would be allocated as outlined in the Commissioner's proposals.

Concern was also expressed regarding the recruitment process for PCSOs and officers and the ability to recruit to target levels, particularly as a large part of the strategy appeared to focus on transferees. The Commissioner and Chief expressed confidence regarding attaining PCSO numbers. However, the recruitment of police officers was highlighted to be more problematic, in particular because the timelines for recruitment have been set against the attrition rate at North Yorkshire Police (NYP). There is a significant amount of ill-health retirement of officers mid-service and a piece of work is underway nationally to help tackle this. The Chief acknowledged that NYP need to get better at factoring this attrition into their recruitment plans.

The Panel conveyed concerns regarding the Commissioner's savings plans, in view of the difficulty identified in recent years in being able to deliver against these, and because little detail had been provided on these in the paperwork. The Commissioner advised that 11 business cases have been agreed in principle and which would generate savings in areas such as procurement. However, some of these are at a sensitive stage in respect of staffing so the Commissioner was unable to share further details, but committed to doing so for the next Panel.

Some members of the Panel expressed that they felt the level at which the precept proposal was being set was still too high, particularly where there are a lot of significant increases to Council Tax more widely. Concern was also raised that such a considerable increase may not result in a noticeable difference in policing for the public over the course of the next year. The Commissioner sought to reassure the Panel that by April 2020, officer numbers will be back to pre-austerity levels and there will be more PCSOs at NYP than there have ever been.

The Panel recognised the need for greater resources to be put into local policing, as discussed at the previous Panel meeting. Members also acknowledged that the Commissioner has no alternative but to increase the precept to the level proposed as the government will not provide this opportunity to boost resources if it is not taken up in 2019/20.

In this context - and balanced against the concerns highlighted - Panel members considered that the proposal could be accepted but that this would be done with significant reluctance. It was recommended - and agreed - that to accept the proposal would necessitate more rigorous financial monitoring going forward by the Panel around the policing budget. This would be with a view to getting the requisite assurance that adequate progress is being made against the Commissioner's plans for 'Reinforcing the Frontline' and against the Police and Crime Plan generally. In addition, more detail needed to be presented to the Panel to set out progress against savings plans and to outline the business cases which have been agreed

Resolved -

That the Panel:

- (a) agree the revised policing precept proposal of the Commissioner at £255.77 for a Band D property for 2019/20;
- (b) receives quarterly budget monitoring reports from the Commissioner, along with progress updates against savings plans.

The meeting concluded at 12:00pm.

DP