

Item 4 – Firearms Licensing:

Members will be aware of the tragic events in Plymouth on the 12 August, where Jake Davison shot and killed five people in the Keyham area of the town before fatally wounding himself.

Chair – I am sure that the Panel would join me in sending our thoughts to the family and friends of Maxine Davison, Sophie and Lee Martyn, Stephen Washington and Kate Shepherd, plus to the two further individuals shot and wounded, who have not been publicly named.

The first thing I would say Chair, is that mass shootings are incredibly rare, and indeed this was the first incident of this type since the Cumbria shootings of 2010.

The second thing to highlight is the incredible police and partnership response to this horrendous incident, and to offer our thanks to those officers, staff and volunteers who continue to put themselves in harm's way to protect us.

Whilst it is premature to engage in debate around the possible motive for this senseless tragedy and, of course, this remains an operational policing matter, the issue of firearms licensing has been raised and given the Panel's previous scrutiny of this function I thought it helpful to provide an overview of the work underway – as this has been my focus.

By way of brief background, Chair, it might be helpful to reiterate that Firearms Licensing is governed by the Firearms Act 1968 and its amendments, coupled with the Home Office Guide on Firearms Licensing Law 2016. Force firearms licensing functions are also subject to Dorset Police internal governance, the HMICFRS inspection regime, and to oversight by my Office.

It might also be helpful to explain to new Members that firearms licensing went live as an Alliance function across Dorset, Devon & Cornwall in 2017. The Alliance Unit receive and process all aspects of firearms and explosive licensing applications and renewals.

The Team undertake enquiries consisting of research, telephone-based risk-based assessments or home visits. This results in a recommendation whether, or not, a certificate should be issued or renewed. This is then reviewed by the Alliance Firearms and Explosives Licensing Manager, who makes a decision under delegated powers from the Chief Constable.

In terms of my activity, Chair, immediately following the shootings, The Chief Constable updated me on the high-level details of the incident and later provided a fuller briefing at Joint Leadership Board.

There are three related reviews that I am linked into to a greater or lesser extent.

Firstly, is the usual referral and subsequent investigation by the Independent Office for Police Conduct. This investigation has confirmed the initial facts of the case, and you will understand, Chair, that it is not appropriate for me to make any comment on this and must allow it to follow due progress, however when the findings released, I will clearly discuss this with the Force.

Secondly, an internal investigation is underway, led by the Assistant Chief Constables of both D&C and Dorset. This is largely focusing on the operational side of the business, and so I have played no role in this thus far but, again, expect to consider these findings in due course.

Thirdly and finally, Chair, at a strategic level the Chief Constables and PCCs of both forces have agreed for an external peer review to take place to consider the degree to which current policies and processes within the Alliance Firearms Licensing Unit are compliant with national guidance and practices, together with an assessment of how policy is currently applied.

The review team will consider the vetting process, the management of risk and the decision-making processes within the unit. As Dorset PCC, I was one of four signatories for the terms of reference of this peer review.

I hope this was of help Chair, I am happy to answer questions but clearly, I am not able to comment on any ongoing investigations or reviews.

Item 8 – VfM for Uplift:

Chair, Government made a manifesto commitment to recruit an additional 20,000 police officers in England and Wales in the three years to 31 March 2023.

In Dorset, our March 2020 baseline was 1,267 officers (headcount), and our target was to recruit an additional 50 officers in year one. We achieved this target – recruiting an additional 52, to take our headcount up to a total to 1,319 officers as of March 2021.

Our target to recruit a further 50 officers during year two (2021-22) remains on track, as we have several officer recruitment routes open to candidates, but the main routes are for those:

- Joining without a degree (via the PCDA - Police Constable Degree Apprenticeship - route on a three-year course that enables students to gain a degree)*
- Joining with a degree (via the DHEP - Degree Holder Entry Programme - route on a two-year pathway)*

There are also routes open to both transferees and re-joiners, and our positive action team has been able to restart face-to-face public engagement over the summer to highlight our vacancies right across our diverse communities.

In terms of the value for money for these additional officers, I suspect Members would want to know broadly what roles these additional officers have been deployed into.

Chair, the fact is that all student officers (unless they are on the accelerated detective scheme, which Dorset has only recently launched) are placed into local policing roles, once they achieve Independent Patrol Status, which should happen around week 36 of their training.

These roles are then protected within the local policing command for a period of 68 or 120 weeks (dependent on whether students are on a two- or three-year route) to allow them to gain operational competence, before they are permitted to move elsewhere within the Force. Of course, many will continue to work within these roles once confirmed in rank for many years.

Whilst working within the local policing commands, student officers will be under the guidance of Training and Development Officers, who will continue to tutor, guide and support students to achieve full operational competence, and ultimately be confirmed in rank.

Chair, hopefully that provides Members with a short overview of the police initial training process, and the assurance that not only the vast majority of our new officers will spend significant periods of their training within local police commands, but significant numbers also choose to remain there for a prolonged period.