

POLICE AND CRIME PANEL – 14 DECEMBER 2023

USE OF THE 2023/24 POLICE PRECEPT

REPORT BY THE CHIEF FINANCE OFFICER

PURPOSE OF THE PAPER

To provide Members with a summary report on the how the Precept is being and has been used throughout 2023/24.

1. BACKGROUND

- 1.1 Following the meeting in February 2023, the Police and Crime Panel provided formal notification of their decision to support the proposed increase in police precept equivalent to an additional £15 per annum on a Band D property.
- 1.2 Alongside this decision, the Panel set out their intention to seek assurance, through the forward work plan, that the PCC would implement the direction as set by the Minister for Policing and the Fire Service and hold the Chief Constable to account for the delivery of several improvements. This covered both national and local priorities.
- 1.3 Members of the Panel receive reports at each meeting regarding the delivery of the Police and Crime Plan which utilises resources from both the Force and the commissioning budget to deliver the activities. This report will highlight some of the key activities that relate to the utilisation of the Precept in 2023/24, but it should be noted that considerably more information is contained within the quarterly monitoring reports.
- 1.4 Further information on how the Chief Constable has utilised the 2023/24 budget will be provided as part of the budget discussions in February.

2. NATIONAL PRIORITIES

Resources

- 2.1 The Police Officer Uplift Programme concluded on 31 March 2023 and Dorset delivered on its 2022/23 target of delivering 67 additional officers. As set out in the 2023/24 Budget Report, part of the government funding was ring fenced and contingent on maintaining the number of officers at the Uplift level, both as at 30 September 2023 and 31 March 2024. This was achieved as at the end of September and remains on track for the end of the financial year.
- 2.2 In a similar programme to 2022/23, additional Officer Uplift targets have been offered, in exchange for once off grants, in order to deliver the 20,000 additional officers across the country. Dorset Police was successful in achieving 17 additional officers in the first round and a further 10 officers in the second round. These were delivered as at the end of September and also remain on track for 31 March 2024, however, if additional funding is not provided in 2024/25 this will create a budget pressure going forwards.

Productivity, Efficiency and Effectiveness

- 2.3 The delivery of a framework – the Productivity Review – that is slated to eventually aid the comparison of productivity, efficiency, and effectiveness measures over time, and across other Force areas is being progressed nationally. The latest position is that the [Policing Productivity Review](#) was published in October 2023, and the recommendations are now with the Home Office for formal consideration. Furthermore, the policing productivity team has agreed with the Home Office to focus on four new areas of work: missing, custody, restricted officers/staff and artificial intelligence, reporting back to the Home Office in March 2024.
- 2.4 In the absence of this framework, however, local work continues apace. The main area of development this year being the planned national introduction of Right Care, Right Person. This is a joint partnership approach to managing those in mental health crisis, that will ensure the right response by the right professional.
- 2.5 In addition to new national working protocols being worked up and agreed by policing, health and other relevant partners¹, national funding has been made available to better support people experiencing – or at risk of experiencing – mental health crises to receive care and support in more appropriate settings outside of emergency care, helping to ease pressures facing the NHS². Locally, this includes £475,000 to Poole, Bournemouth, and Dorset County Hospitals. With the National Partnership Agreement being signed, Dorset Police and the Integrated Care Partnership will work closely together to safely implement Right Care, Right Person in Dorset.
- 2.6 As reported last year, Dorset Police has also invested in Robotic Process Automation (RPA), which is the automation of business processes using a 'digital workforce' which when trained, mimics the activities of staff. RPA reduces the amount of time staff spend on repetitive and routine activities, allowing more time to be spent on interaction with the public and jobs requiring a greater degree of complex problem solving or human judgement.
- 2.7 The introduction of RPA within the Dorset Police Victims Bureau has brought many benefits. Staff have been able to prioritise speaking to the victims of the most serious crimes. The RPA digital worker has updated more than 1100 victims of crime via email and text messages between June and August 2023. This equates to time efficiencies of 140 hours in total or 46 working hours saved each month. All contact made by the RPA digital worker assists considerably with increasing Force compliance with Victims' Code of Practice (VCOP).
- 2.8 Prior to automation, high staff demand was leading to low VCOP compliance (e.g. 37% in August 2022). Post November 2022, after the implementation of RPA, performance data shows that even in times of high demand, the RPA solution is achieving good VCOP compliance (87% in July 2023, and 84% in August 2023).
- 2.9 Dorset Police continued to support national initiatives led by BlueLight Commercial (BLC), a membership company owned by policing and focused on deriving savings from national procurement contracts. During 2022/23, Dorset Police realised slightly over £150,000 cashable savings through contracts negotiated by BLC, including on vehicle purchasing (c. £110k), fuel cards (c. £4500), and contingent or contract labour (c. £31,500). There was also a further saving of over £30k through cost avoidance, with work that would have otherwise been carried out locally being managed by BLC. Whilst beneficial, this total saving of c. £190k, represents around one-tenth of one percent of Force net revenue expenditure.

¹ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/national-partnership-agreement-right-care-right-person/national-partnership-agreement-right-care-right-person-rcrp>

² <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/mental-health-services-boosted-by-150-million-government-funding>

3. LOCAL ISSUES

Reconfiguration of the Force

- 3.1 During the year, Dorset Police has been further developing the initial work undertaken by external consultancy, Process Evolution, to consider whether the Force is structured in the optimal way to efficiently manage its current and expected future levels of demand.
- 3.2 The 'Future Operating Model' work is a significant programme, the strategic aim of which is to deliver an approach that meets the Force vision, Police and Crime Plan, and improves the service delivery to the public. Whilst the detail of this work cannot be shared, an initial six options were developed, five of which have been discounted, with the remaining option being further refined into two more detailed options, which are undergoing final due diligence.
- 3.3 This approach is holistic, taking into account people, systems and processes, and so the result will not simply be a new operating structure, but also a new way of working, supported by new systems, policies, procedures and processes. Recognising that this must be done 'with' rather than 'to' the workforce, care is being taken to involve and consult as these options are developed, refined, and tested. OPCC has been engaged on this process, and looks forward to the final decisions being made in the new year.

Customer Service

- 3.4 Following reports of Dorset Police having poor performance regarding response times, the PCC issued the Force with a formal challenge to improve the service, as a result, the Force established a strategic group to assess and resolve the issues identified. Consequently, significant work was undertaken to improving the service Dorset residents received, culminating in a reduction in the average time for a 101 call to be answered being halved, whilst maintaining 999 performance at the same level.
- 3.5 In March of this year, Dorset Police switched to using the national Single Online Home (SOH) website. SOH has been introduced across the majority of police forces over the last few years to bring uniformity and consistency to the process of finding out more about your local police service. Essentially, the site offers a 'digital front counter' – making reporting non-emergency matters easier and quicker and getting community information to the right person as efficiently and effectively as possible.
- 3.6 Dorset Police has continued to use Community Contact Points in several areas, including Swanage, East Dorset and Christchurch, with the aim of providing a range of dedicated events intending to increase accessibility and visibility in local communities. These contact points offer a facility to report crime and incidents as well as offering prevention advice and generic engagement.
- 3.7 Additionally, a trial opening of front desks at Blandford, Lyme Regis, and Swanage Police Stations is underway, with Blandford Station front-desk having re-opened on the 27 March this year, Lyme Regis re-opening on the 30 May, and Swanage re-opening on 25 August.
- 3.8 The PCC's scrutiny of the Force's complaints handling is also undertaken through the Use of Police Powers and Standards scrutiny panel, attendance at the Standards and Ethics Board, the newly reformed Legitimacy Board, and also through the OPCC's complaints review work.

Fight Violent Crime and High Harm

- 3.9 The Safer Schools and Communities Team has continued to provide targeted interventions to reduce and prevent violence and knife crime. The OPCC has launched two rounds of its 'Fix the Future' fund to help create more prevention and diversion schemes across Dorset by

supporting projects and initiatives which will benefit young people and their local community; the PCC has agreed to fund the purchase of additional knife wands and a knife arch, enabling a wand to be placed in every police vehicle; and the PCC has agreed to fund two roles within his office to directly support violence reduction and prevention, and pump-prime the creation of a Dorset Violence Reduction Unit. Further information on these, and other, initiatives undertaken to reduce violence can be found in the Violence Reduction report.

- 3.10 The Paedophile Online Investigation Team (POLIT) was increased by 2 FTEs and there has also been investment in cutting edge computer equipment in order to enhance the capability to triage seized digital devices and the grading of indecent images. This improves the timeliness of investigations and mitigates the risk of offenders being on bail for prolonged periods. As more offenders are prosecuted for indecent image offences, the number of Registered Sex Offenders who require management in the community also increases. The Force has consequently increased its Offender Managers by 2 FTE in order to manage this demand.
- 3.11 In terms of County Lines, the work of Op Viper and Op Scorpion continue to tackle drug crime across the county. For example, during the national week of action on knife crime, in November 2023, Dorset Police gave educational presentations to 3,535 students in 19 schools, removed 28 knives from circulation, (including from knife bins and seizures) and through Op Viper made 14 arrests for knife-related crime, with eight weapons sweeps conducted. Phase Six of Op Scorpion ran during October 2023, and Dorset Police made 26 arrests, charging five people and safeguarding three vulnerable adults, whilst seizing over £93k worth of drugs and over £1300 in cash, plus 17 mobile phones and two weapons.
- 3.12 Considerable activity continues to be undertaken to address Violence Against Women and Girls. Of particular note, the OPCC has secured an additional £261,000 to fund services that support victims of domestic abuse and sexual violence. This included additional Independent Sexual Violence Advisors (ISVAs), Domestic abuse advisors, trauma counselling and behavioural pattern-changing courses.
- 3.13 Work is also underway with the Force and partner agencies to review the services that are currently available to victims in Dorset. Following an independent report from Safelives, in which they raised concerns relating to the independence of the services and ‘scope creep’ between victim care and police tasks, the PCC and Chief Officers approved plans to move towards a Pan-Dorset Independent Domestic Violence Advisor (IDVA) service. Regular multi-agency meetings, led by the OPCC, are driving forward this project.

Fight Rural Crime

- 3.14 That there has been a significant increase in the size of the Force’s Rural Crime Team is, hopefully, now well recognised. The Team has grown fourfold since 2021, with their now being the capacity for 18 members. With this increase, the team have helped return over £1 million worth of stolen machinery to victims of crime over the last year. The PCC has also supported investment into another new vehicles for the Rural Crime Team with a bespoke 4x4 vehicle joining the rural crime engagement van and further allowing the Rural Crime team to reach more remote areas and rural communities.
- 3.15 In April Dorset hosted the first ever ‘South West Regional Rural Crime Conference’ which saw the five police forces across the South West come together to share best practice and learn from industry experts.
- 3.16 The PCC’s Partnership Against Rural Crime (PARC) continues to address issues affecting rural communities. One such example is, as detailed within this meeting’s dedicated paper on fly-tipping, that – following work undertaken by the PARC’s Fly-Tipping Task and Finish Group – the PCC agreed to fund a dedicated post designed to increase the capacity for enforcement action. The aim is that this new approach will result in a higher number of FPNs and Community

Protection Notices/Warnings being issued, as well as an increase in prosecutions relating to fly-tipping. Further developments will of course be provided as part of the Police and Crime Plan monitoring reports in future quarters.

Put Victims and Communities First

- 3.17 Aside from the work to improve victims' services mentioned elsewhere in this report, Dorset Police has addressed resourcing issues this year, and delivered on the well-developed plans to invest in and increase the number of qualified detectives in Dorset Police by building on the Direct Detective Entry Programme and developing internal recruitment.
- 3.18 The target for recruiting people onto the Direct Entry Detective Programme in 2023/24 was 16 and to date 18 have been recruited, with a potential for a further four in the intakes later in the year. In addition, the Force also recruited nine Police Staff Investigators at the beginning of the year in order to supplement the investigative capability.
- 3.19 Aligned to this, is the ongoing activity to continue to drive up positive outcome, or detection, rates. In the early part of the year the Dorset Police 'Make the Difference' (MTD) team led a deep dive into this area, including visiting and understanding at a far deeper level the actions leading forces had undertaken to improve their rates. The team highlighted investigative and file-building capacity as a primary limiting factor, and the lack of visibility of the detailed arrest and out of court disposals data to local commanders being a further concern.
- 3.20 Whilst it is expected that the additional investigative resource will address the first area of concern, as a result of this analysis, additional measures have been put in place around the numbers and proportions of arrests, versus those for community resolutions – to take steps to improve the rates for both in comparison to elsewhere.

4. POLICE FUNDING

- 4.1 The Budget Report considered by the Panel in February 2023 set out that significant savings would need to be delivered in order to balance the budget for 2023/24. Savings totaling £7.3m were built into the budget and at this stage of the year, almost 85% have been delivered which is a significant achievement. Of the remaining savings, 12% are taking longer to deliver than originally anticipated and will be delivered as part of the 2024/25 budget. Only 3% of the original savings are now considered either unachievable for the 2023/24 year or were double counted. These will be removed from the base budget for the 2024/25 budget process.
- 4.2 The PCC continues to lobby for fair funding for Dorset, both in relation to general funding but also regarding specific funding pots such as Safer Streets Funding and Violence Reduction Units. The Home Office work on the Formula Funding Review is ongoing and a consultation was expected on some aspects of the review in early 2023, however no consultation has yet been issued.
- 4.3 The PCC has been successful in obtaining funding from a number of funding streams such as Safer Streets Round 5 for 2023/24 and 2024/25 working alongside partners to deliver improvements. In addition, Dorset has also been a pilot area for the Immediate Justice scheme, receiving funding to provide quicker consequences for anti-social behaviour. In total, nearly £3.1m of additional government funding has been secured for Dorset.
- 4.4 The Home Office has, once again, declined to provide funding for a Violence Reduction Unit for Dorset. As a result, we are now pushing ahead with plans to create a modest team which will be funded initially by the Police and Crime Plan reserve, with a hope that partners will provide further funding in the future, as part of their Serious Violence Duty. It is hoped to have people in post during Q4 and further updates will be provided through the quarterly monitoring reports.

5. RECOMMENDATION

5.1 Members are asked to note the report.

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