

Police and Crime Panel PCC Responses

9 October 2024

Item 2 – Minutes and Actions

[ACTION – ANSWER NOT REQUESTED AT PANEL, PROVIDED FOR INFO]

The PCC would provide more information about the single online home at the next meeting of the Police and Crime Panel.

The Single Online Home (SOH) platform is a national service that now underpins 35 of the 43 police force websites in England and Wales. Or, to put it another way, 80% of the English and Welsh populations are now covered by SOH. It is anticipated that all forces will eventually onboard to the service, with Dorset Police being one of the later adopters.

The intention behind SOH is to ensure that there is a simple and consistent website offering across the police service, rather than users needing to adapt to different systems when engaging with different forces. SOH also benefits from a range of functions that were not universally available to all police forces – for instance, a directory of useful information and advice, informed by national data and learning; the ability to report a wide range of crimes and incidents online; and also for automated communication with police ICT systems. When fully operational, early adopters of SOH are reporting an increased volume of contact from communities, as well as increased efficiency through the automation of systems.

While the benefits of SOH are clear, there are limitations. Most notably, it is no longer possible for SOH forces to make ad-hoc changes to all aspects of the website – indeed, in some instances, alterations require both agreement nationally and, also, to be of greater urgency than other competing requests. When considering changes, the national programme team will seek to implement solutions that benefit all forces, and, naturally, seek evidence and data to support the requests being made. In theory this should mean that web changes are only put in place where a strong business case exists, as opposed to a small number of strongly held opinions.

Another aspect of SOH that deserves closer examination is the use of web forms. The introduction of SOH did not preclude the use of crime and incident reporting via email, which was a separate decision made by Dorset Police. Nevertheless, the introduction of SOH has been shown to greatly increase online and digital reporting in those forces already onboard the system. The online forms are designed to gather all of the information that the police require in order to enact upon reports, comply with data recording rules, and monitor the report thereafter. Typically, the form to report a crime takes around 15 minutes to complete, with the form for reporting intelligence taking significantly shorter.

Of course, the 15 minutes spent completing the “Report a Crime” form may be greater than the time it would take members of the public to email in the basic thrust of their reports and enquiries. However, Force analysis showed that the total time dealing with email correspondence – both in terms of the physical inputs required by members of the public and contact handlers, and but also from first contact to the point at which full details had been acquired – was overwhelmingly greater. This is because most members of the public, even those who have a need to more regularly contact the police, do not know exactly all of the information that the police require. So, while the initial email may have been quick to send, the subsequent follow-up emails and calls from the Force means that the SOH forms work out quicker overall. For this reason, it is more accurate to compare the use of such forms with the total time required to report a matter to the police via email, rather than merely the time it took to write the first email in a longer chain.

Item 6 – Police and Crime Plan

Does the PCC support the increase stop and search across the county to cut violent crime as it is a proven way for reducing weapon possession and deterring crime?

PCC Response:

Thank you, Cllr O'Leary, and please allow me to start by making two points of clarity.

The first is that the Chief Constable is solely responsible for operational policing, and the use of police powers – including of stop and search – is solely a matter for her.

The second is that Home Office and College of Policing research consistently shows little evidence to suggest that stop and search provides an effective deterrent to offending. However, it is a key tactic for police to get dangerous weapons off our streets and protect communities from violence.

With that said, I have had many conversations with the Chief Constable about stop and search, and I share the view that it must be intelligence-led and targeted in order to ensure the legitimacy, proportionality and effectiveness of its use is at the heart of what we do.

To ensure that, my office convenes, and I chair the Use of Police Powers and Standards Scrutiny Panel. This is a scrutiny panel attended by members of the public who offer their insight and advice on how Dorset Police exercises its powers through scrutinising policies, processes, and data on powers such as stop and search and use of force, and through viewing Body Worn Video of incidents using these powers.

In the first quarter of this year – so from April to June – there were a total of 541 stop and searches conducted in Dorset, compared to 434 carried out in the same period last year, an increase of 25%. So, in direct answer to your question, Dorset Police is already carrying out significantly more stop and searches than it has previously.

Stop and search remains a common tactic to remove weapons from the street, and as a result, I remain absolutely committed to actively supporting the Chief Constable to enable her officers to use the full extent of their powers, and I welcome the improvement work that is underway to further enhance the effectiveness of this important tactic.

Item 7 – Quarterly Monitoring Report (Q1)

Priority One - Cut Crime and Anti-Social Behaviour

Please could the PCP provide an update on 'Op Shopkeeper' given the increasing concerns about levels of shoplifting?

PCC Response:

Op Shopkeeper started in November 2023 and is an enhanced police operation, focused on prolific and high harm retail offenders.

Both locally and nationally, shoplifting is on the rise and thorough analysis of the issue in Dorset has shown that prolific offenders commit the bulk of retail crime, with each offender being responsible for numerous shoplifting offences.

Op Shopkeeper is targeting these prolific offenders to bring them to justice, removing their opportunity to commit these crimes and provide some much-needed police action to businesses in Dorset. Of note:

- Since November 2023 Op Shopkeeper has targeted 32 prolific and high harm offenders who have been charged with 604 offences of shoplifting. It is believed that greater sentences are being achieved, as the Force is then able to present the true nature of the offenders' prolific criminal activity to the courts.
- The team responsible deals with approximately 70% of reported shoplifting across Dorset, delivering a comparatively very high positive outcome rate (61% in June, 65% in July). The 30% of shoplifting not managed by Op Shopkeeper, is showing a positive outcome rate of 22%, for context.
- Since the launch of Op Shopkeeper, the number of prolific and high harm suspects has decreased by 50% due to this enhanced focus and prioritisation on prolific offending.

We know that shoplifting is under-reported nationwide and, through the Dorset Safer Business Partnership, I am working to encourage businesses to report shoplifting offences to police - to enable the effective targeting of offenders who are negatively impacting our businesses in Dorset. I want to send out a clear message that shoplifting will not be tolerated in Dorset.

Priority Three - Fight Violent Crime and High Harm

Can the PCC provide numbers in relation to the different aspects of violence against women – e.g. those categorised as Violence against Women & Girls, Rape & serious sexual assault and domestic abuse? What work has been commissioned with external groups to address this issue?

PCC Response:

Dorset Police has a wealth of management information on the number of crimes, including on VAWG.

Between April and June of this year, there were an unverified 197 sexual assaults against women (33 of which were domestic abuse offences), compared to 180 offences during the same period last year – an increase of around 9%.

During the same time period, April to June this year, there were an unverified 182 rapes against women (79 of which were domestic abuse offences) compared to 169 during the same period last year, an increase of around 8%. Around 4% of these are stranger rapes.

And just for completeness, during the same period this year, there were 44 sexual assaults against men, and 13 rapes against men. The statistics for overall domestic abuse are given in the quarterly report, but there has been a reduction of around 8% of both DA crimes and DA incidents.

These data are tracked monthly through the Force Performance Board, which is attended by my Chief Executive, and are subject to considerable scrutiny through various formal and informal meetings and boards.

In terms of what has been commissioned – there is a lot of material to cover, but I will try and be brief. VAWG is a cross cutting issue, which is tackled by work across multiple areas, as well as through dedicated focus.

As members will be aware, I set up a VAWG Improvement Panel in September 2023 which is made up of partner agencies, victims' charities, and independent members. The panel reviews six completed VAWG related cases a quarter, with each quarter focussed on a different crime type, having so far considered matters ranging from domestic abuse, stalking and harassment, public space incidents, sexual violence and technology enabled crime. The panel provide feedback and score the victim's experience as a whole, sharing where improvements could have been made, but also commenting on positive aspects. The learning picked up from this panel is shared with the appropriate departments in Dorset Police and with the partners involved with the panel to make improvements to services.

More generally, I have commissioned a significant amount of services focussed on addressing Rape and Serious Sexual Offences and domestic abuse.

Of note is the ISVA contract with STARS Dorset, and the SARC contract which is co-commissioned with NHS England and the Force. The SARC is in place for immediate safeguarding, crisis support, medical needs and forensic collection, whereas the ISVA service provides the longer term practical and emotional support, helping victims recover from trauma and support them through criminal justice proceedings. Through a variety of sources, I provide £630k per annum to these services.

In terms of domestic abuse, I have previously mentioned the ongoing victim service for high-risk victims – but in addition to this, we also are re-commissioning our standard risk domestic abuse service, which is currently delivered by Victim Support. Standard risk is the lower risk level for victims, but we still recognise the need for intervention at this lower level to support victims whilst also reducing the risk of further harm. The challenge here is financial, as my Office is anticipating the new high risk service and the standard risk service will cost circa £750k, which is more than the currently available budget.

In addition to this, we are currently in receipt of an additional £360k for domestic abuse support services, which my office has successfully bid for through government grants.

Aside from these annual commissioned services, the OPCC formed an integral part of a multi-agency bid to the Home Office Safer Streets fund. Subsequently being awarded £745k for VAWG initiatives across both BCP and Dorset Council areas, these initiatives include;

- The BCP Unity Promise (women's night safety charter) – This is a commitment to actively promote night safety, with participants demonstrating to their staff and customers how they take women's safety at night seriously, both reminding customers and staff that BCP as a whole is safe, but also by telling them what to do should they experience harassment when working, or going out and encouraging reporting by victims and bystanders.
- Alcohol & Consent training with STARS Dorset – Consent Engagement Officers have been employed through STARS who provide guidance and education to 15-20 year olds in the school and university settings, and other relevant community settings regarding alcohol and consent, bystander training and respectful relationships. These posts will help reduce the impact of trauma and help women and girls, in particular, to make better choices.
- Bournemouth & Poole College STARS SPOC – Also employed by STARS, a 'specific point of contact' is based within student welfare at the College. They provide advice to the wider staff team and students alike and are able to advise on referrals to the SARC, help the college with risk assessments for students linked to harmful sexual behaviour and also healthy /trusted relationships throughout the college, identify red flags and concerning behaviours/language from students. So far over 600 students have been engaged through this initiative.

- Expansion of the Pineapple Project - within Weymouth, Portland, Swanage and Dorchester. So far, 58 guardians have signed up who will be able to help make sure that young women and girls have as much support as they can, so they feel safe going out in the area they live. Visits to both secondary schools and colleges have been the initial focus, with engagement being a key element as young people have been keen to talk about their experiences. This continues to provide valuable opportunities to educate young people on the risks outside of the home and to highlight behaviours that are not acceptable and that are potentially harmful to others.

In addition to the above, we have also improved CCTV coverage in urban areas around the night time economy, and expanded the LSAVI Licensing scheme.

Chair, as said, there is much more that I could say on this topic, but I hope this gives a reasonable insight into the numbers and the work that is underway to address VAWG.

Please could the PCC provide an update on the 'Domestic Abuse Victim Service'?

PCC Response:

I will start with some context as I note that not all of you have been here to hear previous updates relating to the domestic abuse victim service in Dorset, which we know as the Maple Team. The Maple Team is a multi-disciplined, police employed, unit, delivering a service to high-risk victims of domestic abuse. The team is made up of domestic abuse advisors who wear two hats:

- One – undertake police tasking, safeguarding and target hardening, to ensure the victims immediate needs were met, and.
- Two – To provide a victim service – equivalent to that of an Independent Domestic Violence Advisor (IDVA), to high risk victims of DA – providing practical and emotional support, helping victims recover from any trauma, cut ties with their abuser, and reduce the risk of further abuse.

Over several years, my Office and I have raised concerns regarding the level of service being received by victims, and several internal and external reviews have been undertaken to establish whether our approach is suitable and in line with best practice. Whilst the reviews found positives with the team, it also identified areas of weakness and made recommendations for improvement. The independent DA specialists brought in for the review, Safelives, made a number of findings and recommendations, the most notable being:

1. The blurring of lines between police tasking and the victims support elements of the role.
2. There is a lack of independence of the service, due to the direct link with policing.
3. Dorset is a national outlier as the only Force to have a Police led high-risk victim service.

Due to this, a recommendation was made that the victim support element should be outsourced to bring independence from policing and be in-line with recognised best practice. As this was agreed, and my Office commenced the commissioning process to explore how we could successfully commission the victim service separately, and I am pleased to report that we will be going to market in the coming weeks.

It is anticipated that the new service will commence in the summer of next year, but until this time, the current Maple Team will continue to deliver a service to victims. I would like to thank the individual members of the Maple Team for their ongoing dedication and commitment and be clear that this change is simply to ensure that we are delivering the best possible service to victims, in line with best practice.

Is there any indication that the 'Early Release' of offenders has had impact in Dorset to date?

PCC response:

In a word Dr Mytton, no, the impact to date has been minimal. But I will explain a little more.

Tuesday 10th September saw the implementation of 'SDS 40' – an 18-month temporary extension of the early release scheme for some prisoners on standard determinate sentences that will see them released into the community having served 40% of their sentence rather than the current 50%.

As we know, this is a stopgap measure designed to ease the pressure on the overburdened prison estate, given the prison population hit another all-time high in the week immediately preceding the scheme's launch. The initiative is having the desired effect, and last Friday there were 86,618 people in prison, a reduction of almost 2,000 since that record high.

Chair there are three points to mention here.

Firstly, it is important to note that hundreds of prisoners are released into communities every day. As a result, the processes, systems, and safeguards in place to ensure the safe release and ongoing support of prisoners in our local communities are very well established.

Secondly, the prisoners themselves. Sex offenders, and those serving sentences of four years or longer for serious violence offences, are not included. The scheme also excludes those convicted of domestic abuse, and related crimes such as stalking, and controlling or coercive behaviours.

Thirdly, the local and regional governance around this process. In practical terms, prisons identify the eligible prisoners in their establishment, recalculate their sentences, share that information with probation colleagues in the community, and commence pre-release processes. Probation staff plan for the releases, specifically considering public protection.

Locally, policing, local authorities and other partners received this information from probation and put into place an intelligence and resettlement plan in readiness for the SDS. Everyone who was released early was allocated an Offender Manager within the current probation structure so there is no change of offender management arrangements.

The interdependency of issues for released prisoners – such as housing, physical and mental health, and substance misuse has been recognised – with PCCs having a key role – both regionally through the South West Reducing Reoffending Partnership and locally through the Dorset Criminal Justice Board, which I chair.

All this careful work, Chair, means that the early release scheme has had minimal impact on Dorset to date, and I am confident that should that position change, the processes I have outlined will act swiftly to mitigate the situation, and of course this is something that I will continue to be regularly briefed on.

FY 23/24 Q1 finance questions:

The budget presented to the PCP in Feb 24 stated that the budget gap for this FY would be £2.7M. The Q1 report now states that this shortfall is £3.6M; could the OPCC please outline what has changed in order to lead to this deficit uplift?

When the budget was set, £2.7m of savings were still required, on top of the £1.8m of efficiency savings that were also built into the budget. At 30 June 2024, of the £2.7m savings required, £1.6m have been achieved and nearly £1.1m are still undelivered. Some of these savings are in progress but taking longer to deliver than anticipated and some are not achievable as expected and are therefore being replaced with new savings being developed. I am very happy to cover this in more detail in the next quarter's report to the panel.

One of the main challenges in setting the budget is predicting the number of Officers we will have. Intakes of new officers have to be carefully planned, ensuring we meet our officer target for new uplift officers and replacing officers who leave. There is a delicate balance of meeting our officer numbers in order to make sure we receive our grant but not having too many officers that we can't afford them. At the 31 March we achieved our officer numbers but were 23 higher than we had assumed in the budget. Officer leavers during the first quarter were also slower than anticipated, which is a good thing in terms of maintaining experienced officers but does mean costs have been higher. Overtime in the first quarter

was lower than in previous years but still higher than budgeted and is one of the reasons why tighter restrictions on overtime were introduced following the Q1 forecast.

What assurance is the PCC seeking from the Ch Cons that these savings will not impact on Policing effect for the people of Dorset?

This is business as usual for my team and I, as we regularly seek assurance from the Force on the impact of savings on the Police and Crime Plan and policing more generally. Indeed, it is through the input of my Treasurer, Chief Executive and Director of Operations at various Force Boards that benefits – and disbenefits – are carefully assessed as part of the options appraisal before decisions are made. Police and Crime Plan delivery, Force Strategic Objectives delivery, along with dependencies against other existing change or transformation projects, capacity to deliver said change, and of course financial and non-financial savings are all factors that are comprehensively taken into account before decisions are made at Boards which my senior management team routinely attend.

For example, whilst some of the savings built into the budget are no longer considered achievable as the impact was too great for the level of savings delivered, for example the custody review identified options which would all have created significant impacts for relatively small savings therefore it was decided not to pursue them – I will continue to seek assurances from the Chief Constable as the Force works to bring the spending back in line with the budget, and to understand any impacts and mitigations which can be put in place.

That is, however, not to say that it is always possible to completely mitigate the reduction of any policing effect. Members, old and new alike, will be well aware of the financial challenges that are facing Dorset Police including the police grant allocation formula not being revised since 2013 so some Forces are getting too much and others not enough, meaning Dorset Police receives the second lowest funding in the country and this effect is magnified by other grants being allocated according to this formula. At the same time, no funding is received for the greater cost of policing a rural county or for seasonality – we do not get an extra penny despite Dorset's population growth in the summer. This means that Dorset residents fund over 50% of their police force whilst elsewhere residents may fund as little as 20%. I am clear that this has gone on long enough – it is not right that we are disadvantaged compared to other areas. I hope to build a collective endeavour with politicians in Dorset to lobby hard and address this unfairness.

There are of course positive impacts from some of the changes that have been made such as the introduction of Enhanced Video Response (EVR) and the Investigation and Intelligence Assessment Centre (IIAC), both of which aim to improve the service offered to victims, improve the timeliness of deployment and focus resources, and so Chair, whilst it is not all bad news, but we need this unfairness to be addressed for Dorset.

Item 8 – Right Care Right Person

How has the Police and Crime Commissioner satisfied himself that an appropriate equality impact assessment has been undertaken to ensure that the policy meets the needs of all, including those with protected characteristics.

PCC Response:

An Equality Impact Assessment has been completed at a national level for the entire RCRP programme, with local assessments being undertaken alongside the local phased implementation. These EIAs have been shared and discussed with my Office and the Director of Operations represents me on the implementation board and so I am assured that this work has been undertaken and that mitigation has been put in place.

It is important to stress that nothing with RCRP is intended to detract from the engagement that the Force undertakes with Dorset's communities. Indeed, the central tenet of RCRP is to ensure that the most appropriate care is provided to those in need of professional assistance. So, while it is acknowledged that, for example, those with disabilities are likely to be more impacted by RCRP than those without disabilities, the over-riding intention is, naturally, that the changes should be positive.

It is concerning to read the statistics and the level of mental health need. The increase of 23% in Dorset over the given period shows how this area of work is important. I note the 4-stage implementation and would ask what the key challenges are?

PCC Response:

One of the key challenges for the RCRP programme is that police officers appear to have been working beyond their duty – or expressed another way, when it comes to mental ill health the police have increasingly been seen as 'the first port of call, rather than the service of last resort'.

Change can often be difficult to achieve and having operated in a certain way for many years now, one of the challenges is to ensure that officers and staff are comfortable in making different decisions and that front-line operators adopt the change, as well as understand the rationale for implementing RCRP in the first place. This has required, and will continue to require, extensive training and stakeholder engagement work.

Of course, as RCRP progresses into phase three and phase four, we are not naïve to the possibility that the health and social sectors also need to adapt to these changes and that there may be circumstances in which those suffering from mental ill health receive a delayed service. One of the challenges for partner agencies then – especially if mental health demand continues to rise – will be funding and, no doubt, in some cases a need to re-design frontline services.

How is the PCC ensuring that the "Do Nothing" option is not taken by other agencies during a mental health incident, thereby leading to an event degradation - which then requires police action? How has the PCC ensured that the Ch Cons has sufficient legal protection for her staff should other agencies not take on their responsibilities under RCRP, which may result in harm to self or others?

PCC Response:

It is important to stress that, as PCC, I am of course not responsible for clinical interventions within Dorset – so I understand why you have asked the question, I think it's important that members of the public recognise that it is not for me to direct the medical treatments that are, or are not, suitable in any given situation.

That said, I am assured that all agencies are working together to ensure that RCRP is implemented successfully and that the needs of those suffering from mental ill health are at the forefront of partnership discussions. We are clear that sufficient time is being provided to partner agencies to best prepare for each of the four phases.

Otherwise, it is also important to stress one of the key issues with the approach being taken prior to the implementation of RCRP, which is that police officer attendance could very easily lead to the sort of 'event degradation' we are trying to avoid.

In terms of the legal protection, this has been thoroughly examined at a national and local level. The legal advice clearly indicates that the RCRP approach is sound and that it is the unnecessary attendance of officers, rather than the lack thereof, that arguably invites the greatest legal risk. RCRP has been extensively piloted elsewhere and the local legal advice supports the national position and early experiences elsewhere.