

Staffordshire Police, Fire and Crime Panel

Report of the Chairman of the Police, Fire and Crime Panel

To Member Local Authorities

In accordance with agreed practice I am reporting on matters dealt with by the Police, Fire and Crime Panel at its meeting on Monday 28 October 2019.

The main items considered were:

Police Establishment Numbers – The Panel continue to seek clarification from the Commissioner of the numbers of warranted officers recruited over the 2018/19 and 2019/20 financial years, in order to satisfy itself that the undertaking given by the Commissioner to Council Tax payers that the increase in Precept would fund an additional 69 Police Officer posts was being adhered to. The Panel questioned the Commissioner on the base figures on which that additional 69 had been calculated.

The Commissioner reported on the Force Target Operating Models (TOM) (ie number of personnel required) for 2017-2021 indicating that the actual number employed by 31 March 2020 was expected to exceed the TOM by 3 posts at a total of 1639.5. He also referred to recent Home Office announcements on increases in policing numbers in 2020/21 giving an additional 90 posts in Staffordshire. More details on those posts and their funding was awaited.

Discussion widened to comparative figures for budgets and establishment figures for similar/neighbouring Force areas and more information was requested in view of the Panels concerns that the Staffordshire Force is ranked 3rd from bottom of the Table for numbers of warranted officers per 100,000 population.

Disposal of Surplus Police Service Buildings/Stations/Posts

A member of the public attended the Panel and asked the Commissioner to consider removing the Eccleshall Police Station site from sale on the open market to enable the community to draw up a viable proposition for its future use. The questioner submitted that Community Groups were unable to compete with commercial organisations and suggested that the site had to be retained for community use. For his part the Commissioner reported a wish to see the site used by the community however he had a duty to realise best value. He further queried the community's intended use for the site reporting on conflicting proposals.

With regard to other sites, the Commissioner reported the completed sale of Stations at Stoke, Newcastle under Lyme and Kinver, the anticipated completion of the sale of the Wombourne site in November 2019, the listing of the Eccleshall and Blythe Bridge sites as Assets of Community Value and the intended re-marketing of the Tunstall and Stone sites.

Collaborative Working – Fire and Rescue and Police Services

The Commissioner reported on the pleasing and innovative approach being adopted by both Services and paid particular tribute to the positive attitude of staff affected by

the re-organisation of various support functions to provide a 'Joint Enabling Service'. To date Communications, Procurement, Estates and Facilities and HR had been integrated with the Finance function to follow later in the year, subject to consultation.

With regard to the joint use of facilities by the 2 Services, the Commissioner reported that the co-location of the Tamworth neighbourhood policing Team with the Fire and Rescue Service at Tamworth Community Fire Station was nearing completion. Planning continued for the move of the northern policing response team to Hanley Community Fire Station. Both proposals would provide on going financial benefits and capital receipts.

At the time of the appointment of a single Section 151 Officer for both the OPFCC and the Fire and Rescue Service, the Panel requested a six month update on the practical implementation of that combined role. The Commissioner reported that the skills and expertise of the postholder combined with the reallocation of some of the posts' previous duties meant that the merger of roles had been successful with the postholders experience in developing collaborative working bringing benefits across the board.

Specific Initiatives pursued by the Fire and Rescue and Policing Services

The following initiatives/work streams were specifically referred to in the Commissioner's report and discussed by members as appropriate:

- *Fire and Rescue Service* – The Safe and Well Campaign – Future work would seek to overcome restrictions on data sharing by public bodies, to assist the Service in expanding the campaign to wider groups in the community.
- *Fire and Rescue Service* – Work to address the increase in recorded Secondary Fires (ie small outdoor fires not involving People or Property) .
- *Fire and Rescue Service* – Hosting a visit by Home Office representatives to view the Community Sprinkler Project, and the opportunity it presented for Staffordshire to give an input into future building safety legislation.
- *Police Service* – The success of the expanded SPACE Programme during the summer school holiday period. Data was awaited on levels of reported Anti Social Behaviour during the corresponding period
- *Police Service* - Early Intervention work carried out in Partnership with the Prince's Trust with 64% of young people who were engaged in the Programme achieving a positive outcome in terms of education, training or employment.
- *Police Service* - 101 Reporting Service – Discussions were on going with the Chief Constable to address fluctuations in performance.

Medium Term Financial Strategies – Updates

Fire and Rescue Service -The Budget and MTFs were reported to be on target. £0.3m of an efficiency/saving target of £0.5million applied for 2019/20 as the final year of a four year budgetary commitment to the Home Office had been realised to date. The MTFs remained constant with a forecast funding gap of circa £3million at

2022/23. Of note was indications from the Home Office that for 2020/21 current funding levels would be protected and an inflationary increase provided.

Police Service - The report focussed on the extent to which national factors, such as pay awards, ROCU (Regional Organised Crime Unit) funding and Precept Referendum changes (predicted to be reduced to 2% for 2020/21) had affected the overall budgetary position.. A significant increase in the funding gap of circa £5.7m by 2022/23 resulted. Overall spend levels were favourable with General Reserves reinstated to approximately 3% of total budget. Uncertainty around future funding presented difficulties in submitting positive proposals to address funding shortfalls. For example Government pledges for additional police officers (estimated to provide 90 more officers in Staffordshire) did not set out long term funding arrangements for those posts. In addition, the suggested return of the Precept Referendum limit to 2% had consequences for future budgets which had been based on the assumption of a 2.99% increase. The Commissioner's response to national consultation was calling for local flexibility on Precept levels.

For more information on these meetings or on the Police, Fire and Crime Panel in general please contact Julie Plant (01785 276135 e mail Julie.plant@staffordshire.gov.uk) or Helen Phillips (01785 276143 or helen.phillips@staffordshire.gov.uk)

Details of Panel meetings are issued to contact officers in each of the District/Borough Councils in the County and Stoke-on-Trent City Council for posting on their own web sites.

Stephen Sweeney

Staffordshire Police, Fire and Crime Panel Chairman

Staffordshire County Council