

Police and Crime Panel Update for O&S – October 2024

Cllr Victoria Atherstone, cabinet member for safety and communities

Introduction

I attended my first Police and Crime Panel meeting in September. It provided an excellent opportunity to challenge and ask questions, while learning about the great work of the OPCC, our police force here in Gloucestershire, their knowledge of our local communities and their pending Police and Crime Prevention Plan update. However, the finances and potential impacts to service levels is concerning.

Their six focus themes for Gloucestershire will be the same as before apart from Priority 6 which will change from empowering local communities to improving confidence in and within policing:

1. Creating Safer Communities
2. Tackling violence against women and girls
3. Strengthening your constabulary
4. Targeting the causes of crime
5. Supporting victims and reducing reoffending
6. Improving confidence in and within policing

NB. The Race Action Plan and Better Together will be included in the Police and Crime Prevention Plan's actions that will be published in Autumn 2024.

The Constabulary maintains a database of 'key individual's' across all communities to support communication at a local level. This includes elected representatives, community leaders and partnerships such as the local Community Safety Partnership.

The full minutes of this meeting are [available here](#)

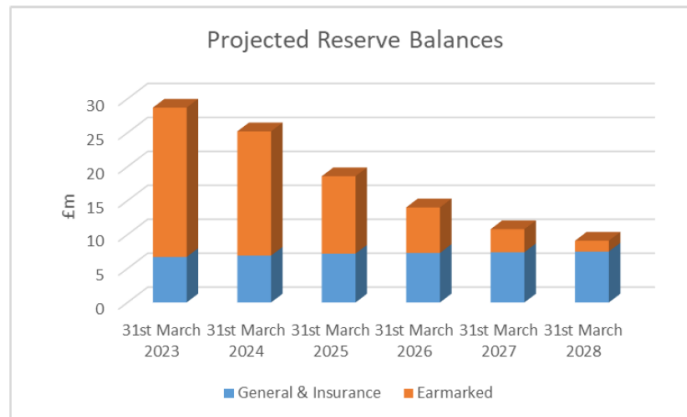
Financial update

We received an update on their Revenue Budget 2024/25 and Medium-Term Financial Plan 2025/26 to 2027/28.

Finances are worrying with reducing reserves and increased borrowing – 'Borrowing levels are estimated to increase from £20.5m at 31.03.24 to £51.8m at 31.03.28. This is an increase of £31.3m. Revenue reserves are estimated to reduce from £25.2m to £9.1m, a reduction of £16.1m over the same period.'

The conclusion stated: Increases in borrowing costs and reductions in reserve levels will increase the need to deliver sustainable savings over the medium term. Efficiency savings will be prioritised; however delivering a balanced budget each year may well impact on future service levels.

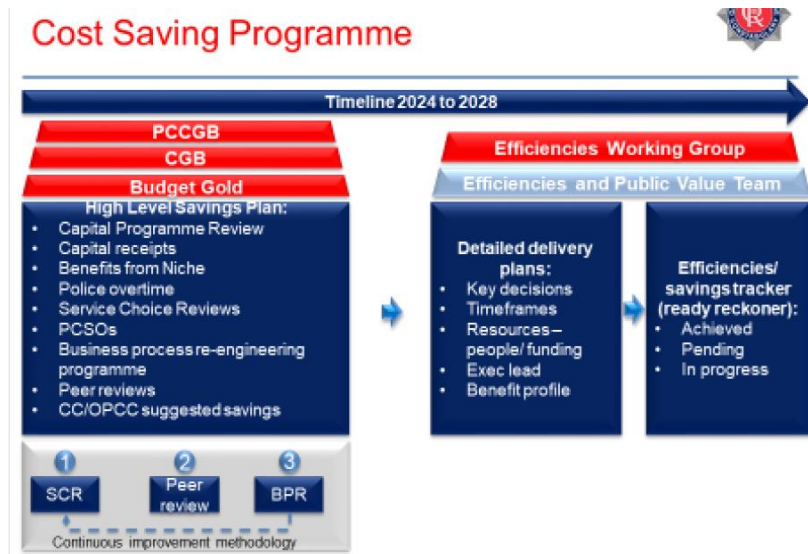
The reduction in reserves is highlighted in the graph below.



NB. Responsibility for the funding of the Constabulary sits with the PCC.

Important comments within the main report stated:

- As reported to the Police and Crime Panel in February 2024, the revenue budget for 2024/25 assumed the use of £4.4m of reserves it also included a saving of £5.2m general vacancy factor and £2.1m for freezing vacant posts.
- The current forecast for 2024/25, based on expenditure to the end of July 2024 shows an overspend of £3.3m, which with taking into account the £4.4m one-off use of reserves, gives an underlying deficit of £7.7m (compared to the net budget of £162.8m).
- The majority of the projected overspend relates to employee costs, for example, police officer overtime which currently exceeds the budgeted level by £1.7m. In addition, the budgeted saving of £5.2m from holding staffing vacancies is not being fully achieved.
- Reserves were utilised to fund improvements in performance within the Force Control Room, support for neighbourhood policing and crime prevention and expansion of our new Victims' Hub.
- The Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP) assumed that no reserves would be used to balance future years which meant that the Constabulary and OPCC would need to identify a further £5.2m of savings and efficiencies in 2025/26.
- Work is already underway to identify opportunities for efficiencies and savings with a senior level joint Constabulary and OPCC efficiency team led by a Superintendent. The team will work with the organisation to bridge the gap in 2024/25 and the MTFP period through a series of work streams, some of which are set out in this report.
- Initial work has provided confidence that savings can be identified over the three years of the MTFP. However, the difficulty of delivering these, some of which rely on the introduction of new technology and a review of assets will not bridge the projected overspend in 2024/25 and the budget gap in 2025/26. With minimal reserves, work is now being focussed reductions that can be made in the current financial year. Wherever possible efficiency savings are being targeted but reduction in service levels may be unavoidable.



I stated: I think it's essential the panel sees a detailed efficiencies and savings plan as soon as possible. There appear to be too many unknowns with each planned workstream and no clear deadlines or return on investment projections with an associated risk register to see how policing services may be impacted over the next few years if objectives are not identified and delivered in time.

I asked that the following information is shared with the panel when it is known:

- What are the timelines for each of these workstreams?
- Are there any dependencies?
- Which workstreams are going to be prioritised and why?
- Will any workstreams run concurrently?
- What is the projected saving / efficiency gains for each workstream?

As stated in the report:

- Council Tax income is 45.8% of net expenditure in 2024/25. It has now been assumed that the Council Tax base will increase by 1.5% in 2025/26, there will be a 2% increase in the precept and the Constabulary will benefit from an additional £0.8m from the additional charge for second homes across the county. An increase from 2% to 5% or a £15 increase in the Council Tax precept would add £2.2m to the organisation's resources, if the maximum increase was set following due process. This would help to protect priority services.
- Police Officer numbers must be maintained at a minimum of 1,335 as per the national 20,000 uplift plan. If numbers fall below this number at checkpoints at 30th September and 31st March the Home Office will deduct £40k of uplift grant for every officer below the threshold. This restricts the areas that can be examined for any savings, including police staff undertaking officer duties at lower cost.

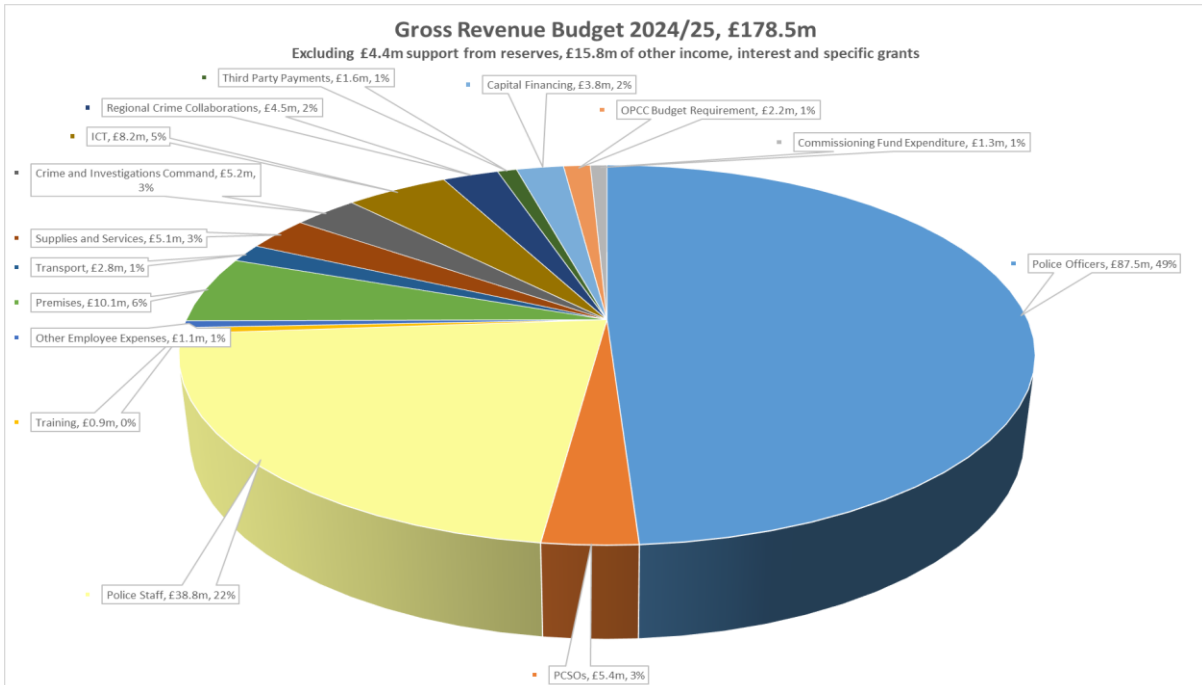
I raised concerns that PSCO headcount is not being replaced when officers leave the force. As of September 2024, we had 124 PCSOs across Gloucestershire.

The Constabulary and PCC have a total budgeted FTE of 2,349

A more detailed review of the gross budget was provided at my request, post panel meeting along with the meeting minutes:

PCC and Constabulary Budgets 2024/25

	2024/25	
	£m	%
Police Officers	£87.5m	49%
PCSOs	£5.4m	3%
Police Staff	£38.8m	22%
Training	£0.9m	1%
Other Employee Expenses	£1.1m	1%
Premises	£10.1m	6%
Transport	£2.8m	2%
Supplies and Services	£5.1m	3%
Crime and Investigations Command	£5.2m	3%
ICT	£8.2m	5%
Regional Crime Collaborations	£4.5m	3%
Third Party Payments	£1.6m	1%
Capital Financing	£3.8m	2%
OPCC Office	£2.2m	1%
Commissioning Fund	£1.3m	1%
Gross Budget	£178.5m	100%
Other Income	-£8.0m	
Interest Received	-£0.6m	
Specific Grants	-£7.1m	
Net Budget	£162.8m	



Services and IT update

Gloucestershire Constabulary planned to use reserves in 2023/24 and 2024/25 to protect services and invested funds into priority services, such improvements as noted in the main report included:

- Increase nine-fold the annual IT capital replacement/maintenance budget to reduce failure demand and increase police capability (was around £350K pa, now almost £3m pa).
- Introduction of a state-of-the-art records management system called NICHE (eventually costing £7m over a few years) to replace our aging IT, the oldest police system in England and Wales. This innovative system will manage all aspects of crime recording, investigation, intelligence, vulnerability, prevention activities, detainee management, voluntary attendance, and property management – as well as electronic case preparation. This should really improve the service we give to victims and witnesses. Work is commencing on a producing a benefits realisation plan from the major efficiencies that will be delivered from this new records management system when it is implemented in October 2025.
- Additional police officers to ensure the operating model is fully resourced, helping to maintain the 34% faster response for Grade 2 incidents, 50% plus cut in antisocial behaviour, 24% rise in arrests and doubling the number of solved crimes.
- Complete the expansion of our new Victims' Hub, ensuring for the first time a comprehensive service for victims from the moment a crime is recorded.
- Continue with the major expansion of our speed enforcement, roads policing and specialist rural crime teams, tackling the crime residents want reduced.
- Provide £1m more to replace aging vehicles and improve operational vehicle availability, thereby increasing police visibility. (as some vehicles are currently off the road).
- Further investment in Automatic Number Plate Recognition cameras infrastructure for our rural roads, helping to track the movement of organised criminals on our road network.

Capital receipts update

The panel was informed that work is underway to review capital assets across the county including underutilised estate such as a 2.8 acre piece of land at Waterwells. More strategic work to rationalise or move to smaller premises across the county while maintaining our police station presence will be initiated by the Head of Estates and an Assistant Chief Constable with support from the Chief Finance Officer.

I asked for the asset management strategy to be shared with the panel once it's been produced.

Recent national public disorder

The national operation in response to the recent public disorder was called Operation Navette. In Gloucestershire, the response to the disorder was coordinated under Operation Mariner.

Thankfully, Gloucestershire did not see any of the unrest experienced in other areas of the country, including within the region. In support of those areas that were experiencing disorder, officers, including the mounted section, were sent to Bristol and Dorset on mutual aid. No Gloucestershire officers supporting with mutual aid were injured in the course of their duty.

I raised concerns with the false information and statements of prejudice shared on online social platforms trying to incite violence and hate crime, posted anonymously, on sites like Cheltenham Noticeboard on Facebook. As nationally it is believed some people may have been motivated by baseless claims on social media in different parts of the country.

The Home Office is working with other agencies to tackle online agitation, and a team that was prepared to deal with misinformation created for the General Election had been stood back up to deal with Op. Navette related issues. This work included the Culture Secretary meeting social media companies to remind them of their legal and moral duties.

Violence Against Women and Girls

I am pleased to note that although nationally this work is referred to as Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG), Glos OPCC now quite rightly recognises this as Violence and Intimidation Against Women and Girls.

The report stated: The harm caused to victims and society by violence against women and girls (VAWG) in all its forms – including but not limited to harassment, stalking, rape, sexual assault, murder, honour-based abuse, coercive control – is immeasurable.

While men and boys also suffer from many of these forms of abuse, they disproportionately affect women. A woman is killed by a man every three days in the UK. Domestic abuse makes up 18 per cent of all recorded crime in England and Wales. In the year ending March 2022, there were 194,683 sexual offences, of which 70,330 were rape.

Policing, and society, must focus on violence against women and girls so that it can be eradicated. The policing response has been shown to be inconsistent and so there is now a national focus on supporting forces to prioritise VAWG-related crimes. <https://www.npcc.police.uk/our-work/violence-against-women-and-girls/>

- Over one million VAWG related crimes were recorded during 2022/23, accounting for 20% of all police recorded crime.
- Police recorded VAWG related crime increased by 37% between 2018/23.
- At least 1 in every 12 women will be a victim per year, with the exact number expected to be much higher.
- 1 in every 6 murders related to domestic abuse in 22/23, with suspected victim suicides following domestic abuse rising year-on-year.
- Child sexual abuse and exploitation increased by more than 400% between 2013 and 2022

The statement caveats that all types of VAWG are likely to be underestimated significantly and recognises that the figures represent the minimum volume of estimated VAWG offences.

Policing have identified 5 high harm and high-volume threat areas which they will focus on over the next year:

- Rape And Serious Sexual Offences (RASSO)
- Domestic Abuse (DA)
- Stalking and harassment
- Online and tech-enabled VAWG
- Child Sexual Abuse and Exploitation (CSAE)

VAWG links to the following Police and Crime Prevention Plan Priorities:

- Creating safer communities
- Tackling violence against women and girls

- Strengthening your Constabulary
- Targeting the causes of crime
- Supporting victims and reducing reoffending

The OPCC Strategic Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence Coordinator has recently joined the NPCC VAWG taskforce one day a week, this will ensure the OPCC and Constabulary are able to keep up to date with national work and updates. They have also introduced [Rapid Video Response \(RVR\) for domestic abuse](#)

I will happily take any questions but if I do not have the answers to hand I shall ask our PCC Chris Nelson during our 1-2-1 meeting on Friday 25th October.

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