

Police & Crime Panel Report for Overview & Scrutiny – 21st October 2019

Date of Panel: 13th September 2019

Summary

In July it was reported in the national media that Gloucestershire Constabulary had received an 'inadequate' rating regarding its reporting of crimes. This panel meeting focused on the reasons for that rating and the constabulary's response to it. The constabulary has diverted resources into its crime recording and is now operating at a higher level, while trying to not compromise on its values as a police force.

The standard items were also presented to the panel, but consequentially were afforded less time than usual.

Appointment of Interim Chief Executive

The Panel welcomed the appointment of Richard Bradley as Interim Chief Executive, following the retirement of Paul Trott. Richard was previously Deputy Chief Executive. This appointment is on a temporary basis because the next Police and Crime Commissioner election is in May 2020.

Non-Standard Item: Gloucestershire Constabulary Crime Data Integrity Inspection

The constabulary recently received an 'inadequate' rating from the inspectorate, regarding its recording of crimes. Presenting to the panel, Chief Constable Rod Hansen explained the reasons why the constabulary received this rating.

The constabulary was found to have correctly recorded 81.6% of crimes. Since this audit, it has diverted more resources into crime recording and appointed a new Deputy Force Crime Registrar. Having focused on improving its performance, the constabulary now reports that it is recording 98.8% of crimes.

Constable Hansen went into detail about the practicalities of meeting Home Office regulations while also delivering value-led policing. He explained to the panel that officers are often placed in situations where they have to make a decision on whether or not to record a crime, and in some circumstances not recording it can be the appropriate thing to do. Several examples were given, including a primary carer being unintentionally injured by a family member who did not wish to press charges, and of the parents of an adult reporting that a sexual offence was committed against that adult, but the adult did not agree. There were other, more sensitive examples raised, and the Chief Constable explained that the police require discretion in order to police our community well.

Reporting a crime has two consequences; it criminalises the individuals involved, and it raises the levels of reported crime in an area. There are legitimate reasons why those outcomes can be undesirable, depending on the circumstances.

Notably, he reported that the constabulary looked back at each instance that they had been deemed to fail by the inspectorate, and said that in the vast majority of circumstances felt that they had made the correct decision at the time.

The Chief Constable, supported by the Commissioner, explained that Home Office regulations are often less flexible than real life situations require. However, both recognise that the rating in and of itself requires improving, and as such they have taken steps to improve this area.

By the end of the meeting, the panel were satisfied that the constabulary has acted in good faith at all times. It welcomes the steps taken to improve performance, and recognises the difficulties faced by the police.

Standard item: Police & Crime Priorities – Quarterly Highlight Report

The highlight report has changed format to make all areas of the police's work easier to review. The panel welcomed the changes. The panel questioned the constabulary's current ICT posture, which the commissioner feels is unsuitable. Presently the constabulary operates two databases, requiring double-entry of data, consuming resources. The commissioner has an ICT fund of £11m which he will look to deploy to improve the ICT setting, but this needs to be aligned to the Home Office's long-term ICT plan for the police force.

The What If... roadshow has been particularly successful, aimed at engaging 16-24 year olds on the consequences of road traffic collisions.

Standard item: Chief Executive's Report

This report was noted by the panel.

For future discussion

Members of the Panel were invited to attend a workshop at police HQ to discuss the workplan of the panel. That took place on October 1st 2019.

Democratic services are currently arranging a date for panel members to attend a budget briefing ahead of next year's budget setting, which should occur in mid-January 2020. There is one more meeting of the panel before then.