

Overview & Scrutiny Committee – Meeting held on Thursday, 13th January, 2022.

Present:- Councillors Gahir (Chair), Matloob (Vice-Chair), Dhaliwal, Kaur, Malik, Sharif and Smith

Also present under Rule 30:- Councillors Ajaib, Bains, Hulme, Mann, Minhas, Swindlehurst and S Parmar

Apologies for Absence:- Councillor Basra

PART I

16. Declarations of Interest

No declarations were made.

17. Minutes of the Last Meeting held on 4th November 2021

Resolved – That the minutes of the meeting held on 4th November 2021 be approved as a correct record.

18. Member Questions

No Members Questions had been submitted.

19. Presentation from the Thames Valley Police and Crime Commissioner and Chief Constable

The Committee welcomed to the meeting the Thames Valley Police & Crime Commissioner (PCC), Matthew Barber; the Chief Constable John Campbell QPM of Thames Valley Police (TVP); and Superintendent Lee Barnham, the LPA Commander for Slough.

The PCC gave a presentation on his work over the past year and key aspects of the Thames Valley Police and Criminal Justice Plan 2021-2025. It was noted that:

- There were five priorities in the Police & Criminal Justice Plan: strong local policing, fighting serious organised crime, fighting fraud and cyber-crime, improving the criminal justice system and tackling illegal encampments. Progress in each area was summarised.
- There had been a net increase of 269 Police officers since September 2019 and the headcount as of June 2021 was 4,519, which was said to be the highest number of officers ever. The target uplift was more than 600 officers from the September 2019 baseline.

Overview & Scrutiny Committee - 13.01.22

- The key partnership work with local authorities was summarised, which included the Violence Reduction Unit that had attracted more than £4m additional funding from the Home Office.
- The PCC had introduced a new funding formula for the Community Safety Fund (CSF), with three-year funding deals to help local areas plan. The PCC acknowledged that CSF funding for Slough would be reduced as a result of the new formula, although it was emphasised that there was a very strong relationship with the Safer Slough Partnership and work continued on a number of other joint bids and opportunities such as the Safer Streets funding.

The Chief Constable and Superintendent Barnham then gave a detailed overview of the work of TVP in the past year. The key points noted included:

- The variety of challenges in the past year including significant Royal events in Windsor and the enforcement and activity in response to the Covid-19 pandemic.
- There had been a reduction in certain offences across the Thames Valley with a 45% reduction in residential burglary, 20% reduction in knife crime and 18% reduction in serious violence. Covid restrictions had had significant impacts on some crime trends, for example fall in burglaries was partially attributed to more home-working and changes to lifestyles.
- Members were informed of several key initiatives such as Project Vigilant which focused on preventing sexual violence and the greater use of digital technology to enhance investigative work and support policing services.
- The average time taken to answer a 999 call was 6 seconds in December 2021 and the average time to answer a 101 call was 1 minute 56 seconds over the past 12 months. The Chief Constable recognised that 101 response times had risen in more recent months and needed to be improved.
- The profile of people joining the police force was changing with a positive action and engagement team seeking to promote recruitment from ethnic minorities. 23% of DHEP course were from Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic groups, and this figure had been increasing.
- The local priorities for Slough were tackling all violence, particularly knife crime, and reducing residential burglary and robbery. There had been no knife related homicides since January 2020 and the number of offences was consistently trending down with partnership work being a key contributory factor in the progress that was being made.

Overview & Scrutiny Committee - 13.01.22

- The Committee noted the work to target Organised Crime Groups (OCGs) in Slough with action taken against four groups being reported, resulting in arrests, prosecutions and asset seizures.
- TVP was shaping neighbourhood policing in Slough to reflect the SBC localities model from April 2022 with the aim of early identification of problems, some co-location and greater involvement of communities. Future local priorities included the continued focus on driving down serious violence and a renewed focus on violence against women and girls.

The Chair thanked the PCC, Chief Constable and Superintendent Barnham for their presentations and thanked them and all Police officers and staff for the work they were doing in Slough to protect our communities, particularly in view of the challenges during Covid-19. The Panel asked a wide range of questions and commented on a number of aspects of the presentations. Councillors Hulme, Bains, Mann, Ajaib, Minhas and Satpal Parmar also spoke under Rule 30. The discussion is summarised as follows:

- Police & Criminal Justice Plan priorities – a Member queried whether young people should be a priority in the plan. The PCC commented that the priorities in the plan cut across all age groups, and key elements had a strong focus on young people, for example the work of the Violence Reduction Unit.
- Crime figures – the Committee welcomed the reductions in crime across the Thames Valley as reported by the Chief Constable in terms of residential burglary, knife crime, personal robbery and serious violence. However, Members were concerned that certain types of crime such as burglary and theft were higher in Slough than the rest of Berkshire. In response, it was highlighted that statistical comparisons could be misleading given the different characteristics of small, urban boroughs such as Slough with larger rural areas in other parts of Berkshire. The key priority was understanding crime issues in Slough and working in partnership to address the problems.
- Police numbers – a Member asked how many of the extra Police officers had been allocated to Slough. It was responded that of the uplift since September 2019, the figure was 22 more officers in Slough and there was additional local benefit from access the more specialist officers operating across the whole force area. A Member asked what impact the cuts the TVP budgets since 2010 had had. The Chief Constable stated that the impact of austerity in that period was a reduction of circa 700 officers and 700 other police staff. The recent uplift was welcome in rebuilding police numbers although it would take time to train new recruits and for them to be fully operationally effective.
- Police recruitment – several Members highlighted the importance of ensuring that TVP reflected the communities they served. The current phase of Police recruitment provided an opportunity to increase the

Overview & Scrutiny Committee - 13.01.22

number of officers from ethnic minority backgrounds and councillors present set out some of the barriers to such recruitment. The Chief Constable set out his commitment to increasing recruitment from ethnic minorities and stated that there were encouraging signs that the proactive work being undertaken was working. Councillors had a role to play as community leaders in encouraging applications. Members also commented on the importance of improving Police culture and practice, for example ensuring fairness and equality in disciplinary processes, to promote the retention of officers from ethnic minority backgrounds.

- Localities strategy – the Committee welcomed the commitment of TVP to align neighbourhood policing with the Council’s localities model. Work was well underway for this to come into effect from April 2022.
- 101 response times – a Member commented that residents had reported significantly longer response times of up to 30 minutes when calling 101. The Chief Constable stated the average times were much lower as reported earlier in the meeting. The public was also encouraged to report non-emergencies online.
- Community Safety Fund – several Members expressed significant concern that the new funding formula had reduced the Community Safety Fund spend in Slough over the next three years. The PCC explained the rationale for the new funding formula and defended the decision on the basis that it was now a fair formula across the Thames Valley which took into account population, crime levels and issues such as anti-social behaviour (ASB). Members were concerned about the cuts to Slough’s allocation given it’s relatively high levels of crime and pointed out that a significant proportion of ASB was reported to the Council rather than the Police which may therefore underestimate the level in Slough, although the PCC commented that this was likely to be a factor across all authorities and was therefore unlikely to impact the formula. Members stated that Slough needed more resources given the challenges it faced, although in response it was noted that the Fund was a relatively small amount of the overall resources allocated to Slough. Mr Barber emphasised his commitment to continued close working with the Safer Slough Partnership including on initiatives such as the Safer Streets Fund. He also invited councillors to suggest alternatives to the formula that could be considered the next time it was reviewed.
- Community Fund – Members asked for more information about the Community Fund. The PCC stated that it was a £200,000 fund for projects to support priorities set out in the Police & Criminal Justice Plan e.g. diversionary activity, CCTV etc. The fund was usually significantly over-bid so strong proposals were required.

Overview & Scrutiny Committee - 13.01.22

- Cyber-crime – the PCC was asked for more information about the work in Slough to tackle cyber-crime. The PCC responded that the majority of activity was Thames Valley wide and including education programmes, working with trading standards teams on scams, training programmes for Police officers on identifying cyber-crime risks.
- Anti-social behaviour – some Members expressed concern at the lack of enforcement on ASB such as street drinking and drug issues in ‘hot spots’ such as Chalvey, despite the fact there had been a Public Space Protection Order in place. Superintendent Barnham recognised the issues and summarised the work TVP had undertaken with the Council and other partners in places such as Chalvey. He encouraged the public to continue to report ASB as gathering information, intelligence and evidence was important to tackle the issues. The Chief Constable underlined the importance of working closely with communities and commented that the feedback loop to local people could be further improved. Councillors emphasised the importance of more local data and ongoing engagement between ward councillors and neighbourhood policing teams.
- Anti-drug strategy – Members highlighted the importance of working closely with schools and young people to promote anti-drug messages and the Chief Constable outlined the extensive engagement TVP had with schools.
- Violence against women and girls – Members welcomed the priority being given to tackling the issue of violence against women and girls but expressed concern that the project was due to end in March 2022 and asked if it could be extended. It was noted that it was Home Office funded and an extension could not be guaranteed. It was an issue that would be best raised with the Safer Slough Partnership. The Committee, PCC and TVP recognised that the issue of women’s safety was a key priority that went beyond individual projects and needed a whole series of actions both in terms of community safety and policing and also in the criminal justice system to increase the number of prosecutions.
- Council Tax precept – a councillor commented on the fact that the Police & Crime Commissioners Council Tax precept had risen 6.94%, which was above the 2% assumed in the medium term financial strategy. The PCC was asked how the increase was justified and what the level was likely to be in future years. The PCC stated that 2% in the financial plan was a budgeting assumption included prior to the Home Office decision to permit a rise in the precept of £15 (6.94%). PCCs across the country were increasing the precept by that amount to support Police resources. In future, the financial planning assumption would be 0% and any increase in Council Tax precept would therefore be based on the case made by the Force for additional resources.

Overview & Scrutiny Committee - 13.01.22

At the conclusion of the discussion, the Chair thanked the PCC, Chief Constable and Superintendent Barnham for attending the Committee and reiterated his thanks for the dedicated and skilled work of police officers and police staff in Slough. The presentations were then noted.

Resolved – That the presentations of the Police & Crime Commissioner and Thames Valley Police be noted.

20. Forward Work Programme

The Committee considered a report on the work programme for the remainder of the municipal year. The next meeting would scrutinise the revenue budget, capital programme and treasury management strategy. It may be necessary to move the date from 17th February and Members would be advised in due course if this was necessary.

The following was noted:

- Nova House – to be scheduled for the meeting in March 2022.
- Section 106 Update a report was suggested, although it was noted this issue had also been raised by the Audit & Corporate Governance Committee and Planning Committee and it may be more appropriate for those committees to be updated prior to any scrutiny.
- Post-Covid recovery of primary care services – it was agreed to keep this in the work programme and schedule for a future meeting.

Other items in the work programme, such as the IT update and annual report on Slough Children First, would be brought to the appropriate meetings. A suggestion was also made for scrutiny of the Section 114 Notice. It was noted that detailed reports on the Council's financial recovery were being put to each ordinary meeting of full Council. Further consideration would therefore be required on the specific areas of additional scrutiny over and above the comprehensive reporting process in place to full Council.

Resolved – That the Forward Work Programme be agreed, subject to the points noted above.

21. Members' Attendance Record 2021/22

Resolved – That the record of Members' attendance be noted.

22. Date of Next Meeting - 17th February 2022

The date of the next meeting was scheduled to be 17th February 2022, although it was noted it may need to be held at a later date if there were any changes to the budget timetable.

Chair

(Note: The Meeting opened at 6.30 pm and closed at 9.12 pm)