

North Yorkshire County Council

Police, Fire and Crime Panel

Minutes of the remote meeting held by Skype on Wednesday 19 August 2020, commencing at 11:00am.

Present:-

Councillors: Keith Aspden (City of York Council), Michael Chambers MBE (Harrogate Borough Council), Richard Foster (Craven District Council), Helen Grant (Richmondshire District Council), Carl Les (North Yorkshire County Council, in the Chair), Ashley Mason (City of York Council), Carl Maw (Scarborough Borough Council), and Peter Wilkinson (Hambleton District Council).

Community Co-opted Members: Santokh Sidhu, Paula Stott.

Assistant Chief Constable Mike Walker (North Yorkshire Police)

Chief Fire Officer Andrew Brodie (North Yorkshire Fire and Rescue Service)

Julia Mulligan (Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner).

Officers from the Office of the Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner: Simon Dennis (Acting Chief Executive and Monitoring Officer), Thomas Thorp (T/Assistant Chief Executive), Caroline Blackburn (T/Assistant Chief Executive), Michael Porter (Chief Financial Officer) Tina James-McGrath (Office and Volunteer Manager).

Officers from NYCC: Diane Parsons (Panel Secretariat), Emily Brayshaw (NYCC Finance).

Copies of all documents considered are in the Minute Book

439. Election of Chair

Resolved -

That Councillor Carl Les be elected to serve until the first meeting of the Police, Fire and Crime Panel until July 2021.

Councillor Carl Les in the Chair

440. Welcome and apologies

Apologies were received from Councillors Tracie Middleton and Tim Grogan.

The Chair welcomed Councillor Carl Maw to his first formal Panel meeting. Attendees were advised that the Panel had agreed during lockdown to extend the tenure of the two independent co-opted members (Paula Stott and Santokh Sidhu) for a year in view of the difficult circumstances presented by the Covid-19 pandemic rendering a recruitment exercise too difficult. The Chair expressed his thanks to the two members for their work to date and for continuing in the role. The Chair also highlighted that the appointment of

Councillor Ashley Mason by City of York Council had been continued for another year, again due to the circumstances of the pandemic, and similarly he expressed thanks to Councillor Mason for all his efforts to date and for continuing service for another year.

The Chair noted that there would be benefit in reviewing the Panel's Arrangements in light of the new ways of working as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic, to ensure that it continues to be 'fit for purpose'.

441. Minutes of the meeting held on 6th February 2020

Resolved –

That the minutes of the meeting held on 6th February 2020, having been printed and circulated, be taken as read and be confirmed and signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

442. Election of Vice Chairs

Resolved -

That Councillor Peter Wilkinson and Councillor Keith Aspden be elected Vice Chairs to serve until July 2021.

443. Declarations of Interest

Councillor Keith Aspden notified that he is a Member of the LGA Fire Services Management Committee and the NJC for Fire Services.

444. Public Questions or Statements to the Panel

The Panel were advised that no questions or statements had been received.

445. Members' Questions

The Commissioner was asked about the handling by police of an incident which occurred during lockdown outside of Betty's in York; whether she felt reassured that it had been properly investigated and whether there were aspects of concern regarding police officer wellbeing during the lockdown. The Commissioner referred to the clip circulated on social media forming only part of a much longer incident and that she was confident about the way it had been handled. Asst Chief Constable Mike Walker outlined the process of investigation that had ensued, that he was satisfied of a thorough investigation and that the use of force applied had been proportionate.

In response to a question regarding the high level of fines given to the public in North Yorkshire during lockdown due to breaches of Covid-19 restrictions, the Commissioner advised that she had been pleased with the North Yorkshire Police (NYP) handling. Rural areas like North Yorkshire tended to have higher numbers of Fixed Penalty Notices (FPNs) issued because of people travelling into the county during lockdown. Asst Chief Constable Mike Walker advised that the issuing of FPNs was undertaken in line with the national guidelines issued but that a great deal of work had also taken place to focus on engaging, explaining and encouraging people to follow the guidelines. Members gave particular thanks to NYP for their efforts at Richmond Falls and in the Craven area for their handling of issues arising during lockdown.

A Panel member highlighted that mental health issues have come to the fore during lockdown and asked for the PFCC's reassurance around support available for NYP and FRS workers. The Chief Fire Officer and Assistant Chief Constable outlined the support available at NYP and NYFRS.

A question was asked regarding s136 of Mental Health Act and whether the facilities used to cope with arrests under this have been impacted upon by the pandemic. The Assistant Chief Constable felt there had been limited or no impact from the policing side. The Commissioner highlighted that this would be raised at the Crisis Care Concordat.

The Commissioner was asked about the guidelines for police officers being properly attired to protect from injury when attending demonstrations. The Commissioner outlined that PPE provision had been available for officers and that it was being used correctly. Officer sickness levels had not increased due to Covid-19.

Two questions were asked regarding the Commissioner's Decision Notice to extend the completion of sale of Newby Wiske Hall to the purchaser, PGL, until May 2022; relating to the Commissioner's confidence level that this would be completed and also around what communication had taken place with the local community about the decision. The Commissioner stated that PGL will cover the costs for running the property until the sale is completed and that this may be before May 2022. The Commissioner wanted to be supportive of business at this difficult time and has also issued a public statement, which it was agreed would be made available to Panel.

446. Leadership staffing update (OPFCC)

Considered –

The report of the T/Chief Executive regarding changes to leadership staffing at the OPFCC, following the recent departures of the Deputy Police and Crime Commissioner and the T/Assistant Chief Executive.

The Panel were introduced to Caroline Blackburn and Thomas Thorp in their new roles as joint T/Assistant Chief Executives and who will pick up the work of both the Deputy Commissioner and the T/Asst Chief Executive between them.

Resolved –

That the Panel notes the report.

447. Covid-19 pandemic response: issues presented for policing and fire and rescue

Considered –

The report of the Commissioner regarding the response to the Covid-19 crisis; how the Commissioner ensured that NYP and NYFRS responded appropriately and how she engaged nationally on key issues.

The Commissioner drew out key issues within the report regarding the impact of the lockdown on domestic abuse, County Lines and racially-motivated crime. A number of discussion points were raised as follows:

- The Panel were advised that there is a backlog of cases to go to court as a result of the lockdown, which could be as long as two years. The Commissioner was asked if the Ministry of Justice (MoJ) could be lobbied to open courts for extended hours when safe to do so. The Panel were advised of the range of actions undertaken by the Commissioner around this, including raising with the MoJ, with all North Yorkshire MPs and meeting with the Law Society, but that she remains uncertain that the government appreciates the full extent of the problem and what would be adequate measures to deal with it.

- Members praised the excellent partnership work which had come out of the response to the pandemic from a range of partners, in particular the NYFRS involvement in a national tripartite agreement which enabled the NYFRS to undertake additional duties such as supporting the ambulance service. The Commissioner responded by referring to the pilot underway in Craven for two tri-service officers. This will be formally evaluated to see if it can be rolled out elsewhere.
- There was also praise for the Commissioner's proactivity around tackling domestic abuse during the pandemic and her work on the York outbreak control boards.
- There was concern that sufficient support would be put in place to ensure a safe transition back to the hospitality industry opening up again in York. The Commissioner and Assistant Chief Constable outlined how this will be managed in such a way as to ensure safety but also support the transition for businesses.
- In response to a Panel query, the Commissioner advised that sickness levels within NYP had been at their lowest levels, with further work underway to try to understand the reasons for this.

Resolved –

That the Panel notes the report.

448. Quarter 1 Budget Reports for Policing and Fire and Rescue Service

Considered –

The reports of the Commissioner presenting the Quarter 1 budget position for both policing and for the fire and rescue service.

Policing budget

Michael Porter outlined key challenges and issues for the policing budget currently and over the coming months, including:

- Current forecasting of a £1.6m shortfall this financial year in receipts.
- Covid-19-related expenditure is having a big financial impact and while the government has indicated that there will be money available for PPE equipment this has not yet been forthcoming.
- There is a need to focus again on the force's savings plans. However, until clarity on income and funding can be obtained then it will be difficult to invest further in the service.
- There are challenges in relation to the delivery of the capital programme, which may result in some expenditure slippage into next year.
- Council Tax receipts are the area of most concern.

Mr Porter also highlighted that forecasts around the levels of police officers and PCSOs are currently in line with expectations, if not actually exceeding them.

In response to a query regarding the forecast underspend in staff pay, Mr Porter highlighted that recruitment had been a challenge during the pandemic but that the underspend is helping the police force to balance pressures being felt in other areas as a result of the pandemic. In response to a further query regarding the overall impact of overspend on the force's reserves, Mr Porter highlighted a £200k overspend forecasted, which would not be a significant impact on the reserves but that they will look to bring this back into balancer over the remainder of this year.

It was agreed with Mr Porter that a further meeting of the Panel's Finance sub-group would be helpful before the next meeting.

Fire and Rescue budget

Mr Porter outlined that the budget position is a relatively healthy one as the service relies less on external income than the police. Grants have also been received to support Covid-19 work. Significant pressures are not expected during the remainder of the year. However, in terms of next year and beyond, there will be a challenge in respect of business rates receipts as the service is part-funded by these. Members were advised that there isn't the capacity to invest further in the service.

Mr Porter was asked about the additional wholetime firefighters resulting in a slight overspend which is being offset through other staff savings and advised that there is no proactive plan to hold vacancies in areas which are under budget. In response to a Member query regarding the £370k funding received and in particular, the £54k for delivery of the lessons and recommendations following the Grenfell Tower Inquiry report, Mr Porter acknowledged that there are specific areas which this funding must be directed to. It was agreed that a further report would be brought to Panel – either for a future meeting or outside of the Panel – giving further information on how this scheme is being delivered in North Yorkshire.

Members asked if a further paper could be brought to Panel once further re-modelling work has been undertaken to understand the impact of Covid-19 and business rates impact.

Resolved –

That the Panel:

- (a) notes the report;
- (b) receives a further report in due course on the impact on the NYFRS of Covid-19 and business rates receipts;
- (c) receives a further report in due course regarding delivery of the schemes funded by the government around high-rise buildings and building safety and in particular on delivery of the lessons and recommendations of the Grenfell Tower Inquiry Phase 1 report;
- (d) arranges another informal meeting of the Panel's Finance sub-group with Michael Porter.

449. Force Control Room performance update

Considered –

The report of the Commissioner regarding the performance of the Force Control Room (FCR) in relation to handling of 999 and 101 calls for service.

The Panel were apprised of how the FCR had coped with high demand and reduced staffing over the lockdown period. The FCR has stood up its fall-back facility in Harrogate to help maintain social distancing. Some FCR staff have had to self-isolate and couldn't undertake their normal role from home but have provided other forms of contact support. The FCR has also been down on staff due to the inability to undertake full recruitment and training. During the warm weather and easing of restrictions, there were high call numbers. The FCR has brought in some additional staff such as PCSOs. The FCR has made good use of online reporting for Covid-related incidents. The Commissioner added her concern regarding the abandonment rate for 101 calls and the need to identify a solution to this, especially as many are not using the call-back facility.

Further to a Member query, it was agreed that a check would be made on why the FCR had an identified gap of 20 staff, not including those self-isolating or on overtime, and whether this was purely around training and recruitment difficulties during the pandemic.

The Commissioner was asked if staff from the fire and rescue service would be able to assist in the FCR but Panel were advised this would not be possible and that the FRS control room is a significantly smaller operation. The Commissioner also acknowledged that retention is an issue as staff move on within the force.

[Michael Porter left the meeting at 12:56]

The Commissioner was asked if benchmarking information for the 101 service is available to help better understand and compare performance levels. The Commissioner highlighted that historically, North Yorkshire has been seen as performing well and that the problems experienced in this area are common to many other forces too.

The Commissioner and Panel then discussed developments around Single Online Home and encouraging more of the public to use online reporting methods.

In response to a query regarding the large increase in 999 calls during the reporting period, the Commissioner acknowledged that this was due to a range of factors, including concerns about spikes in criminal activity and people using 999 where they have been unable to get through quickly to the 101 service.

As it was identified that Members are often approached by the public with concerns about the 101 service, the Commissioner offered to provide a briefing for councillors to explain what has been happening and highlight ongoing and future work around online reporting.

[Santokh Sidhu left the meeting at 13:05]

Resolved –

That the Panel:

- (a) notes the report;
- (b) receives further clarification before the next meeting regarding the identified gap of 20 staff in the FCR;
- (c) receives a briefing from the Commissioner regarding the Force Control Room, which will go out to all local councillors; and
- (d) takes a further update report in 6 months' time.

450. Panel Work Programme

Considered –

The report of the Panel Secretariat, proposing a work programme for the Panel.

Resolved –

That the Panel:

- (a) agrees the proposed work programme; and

(b) will meet remotely on 15th October 2020.

The meeting concluded at 1:12pm.

DP

DRAFT