

North Somerset Council

14 July 2020

Report on the Police and Crime Panel

Councillor Richard Westwood

As this is the first written Police and Crime Panel (PCP) Report, I shall do a brief introduction to the role of the Panel, which is in some ways a 'curious beast' of the local government landscape; in that the members of the Panel do not have a direct supervisory function over Avon and Somerset Constabulary, in the way that for example, the Fire Authority members, have that direct link with Avon and Somerset Fire and Rescue Service.

Instead the PCP is there to act as an oversight group for the activities of the directly elected Police and Crime Commissioner (whose function is to work alongside the Constabulary in a supervisory, but not operational role, in the provision and regulation of all aspects of policing in Avon and Somerset). The PCP has been likened to a 'critical friend' for the Commissioner, I prefer to compare it to one of NSC's Scrutiny panels in that we examine in a structured fashion what the Commissioner (and at one remove, the Constabulary) are up to in providing policing for Avon and Somerset; in particular, of course, we examine how the public's money has been spent for this purpose, also how much money the Commissioner proposes to raise for future provision. Attached to this is one of the PCP's two actual direct powers, we have a (limited) veto over the Commissioner's proposed future budget ,viz, we can send it back for reconsideration just the once (the budget can be re-submitted with a 1 pence variation, and the panel has no further veto powers). Our other power is the veto we can exercise over the Commissioner's appointment of a Chief Constable; one individual can be vetoed, but no more, a substitute has to be accepted.

Briefly, since the start of the Covid-19 Emergency, the Commissioner has been obliged to remain in post for an extra year, she had intended to stand down this year, after 8 years in the job.

The Commissioner recently appointed as her Deputy, John Smith, her former Chief Executive, the PCP had no remit over this appointment, but did ask for, and got, a full competitive appointment process for this post. (It looks as though there are going to be further, potentially serious, developments over this appointment process, which I will give a verbal update upon at the Council Meeting).

Finally, and in my view most importantly, the Commissioner has continued to report back to the PCP, and been scrutinised upon the actions taken by herself and the Constabulary during the Covid-19 Emergency; all associated communications that have come my way have been shared with NSC Members and senior officers.

Richard Westwood