

North Somerset Council

10 November 2020

Report on the Police and Crime Panel

Councillor Richard Westwood

This is the second written report to NSC, and the first item is to welcome back Cllr Roz Willis as one of our two representatives, at least until May 2021!

The Commissioner, Sue Mountstevens, presented a very detailed summary of her work over the last six months, to the panel on the 13th October.

Unsurprisingly, the Covid-19 emergency has increased the workload considerably, with her team moving to weekly board meetings with officers of each of Avon and Somerset police authority's constituent local authorities.

The Commissioner said that the pressure from the Home Office and Ministry of Justice is unceasing, mainly focused on providing statistics and information to very short deadlines, in order to access the various pots of money on offer for policing initiatives. The use of hypothecated funding is indicative of a very centralised state, directing policing through the control of resources. That is just the way things are. Although there has been much publicity regarding the increase in police numbers, the reality is that A&S Constabulary will be required to find around £6million of savings for the coming financial year. The Commissioner said she would be robustly arguing the case for the direction of policing policy to be rooted in local areas, and not directed from the Home Office; (she is on the national PCCs forum as far as policing policy is concerned).

Although all crime had initially decreased following the March lockdown, with the exception of Theft and Burglary, all other offences were back to previous levels. Perhaps unsurprisingly, domestic violence and cybercrime were giving cause for concern. (It is worth pointing out that A&S is seen as being ahead of others, in its provision of specialist Violence Reduction Units and for innovative work on 'Honour' crimes, particularly in Bristol and South Gloucestershire.)

The police officers' sickness levels have dropped to an all time low during the pandemic, also overtime requests are low. Around a third of officers have requested support for mental health anxieties, brought on by the pandemic policing situation.

One 'Elephant in the room' area that the Commissioner pointed to was the difficulties caused by the tremendous backlog of cases in the Criminal Justice system; approximately 500,000 awaiting trial in Magistrate Courts and 42,000 in Crown Courts in England.

(Speaking personally, as your representative, I believe the Commissioner and her Office are doing an excellent job of supporting and regulating our Constabulary during these unique and stressful circumstances.)

Richard Westwood