

Update on Avon and Somerset Police Commissioners Crime Panel

It should be noted that the Panel has three main functions which it has to carry out during the year.

1. Scrutinise and agree the annual Police Budget
2. Scrutinise and suggest amendments to the Annual Police and Crime Plan
3. Investigate any Complaints against the Commissioner

The budget has just been agreed by the Panel but this was by no means unanimous. You may remember that last year the Commissioner was allowed to collect an extra £12 a year on our Council tax to help balance the budget. This was considered a one off increase. However the Government allowed Commissioners to seek an extra £24 a year for this year and this is what her budget is intending to do.

The Panel reluctantly agreed that this took place but returned the budget requesting more detail on whether this increase would be spent on the recruiting of Officers, neighbourhood policing and the concentration on detection of burglary and rural crime.

They did not find the detection rate on Burglary of 8% to be acceptable. Also the new pattern of Neighbourhood policing has only been in place since October 2018 and although this has proved popular with Officers who now come on duty at the same time, and therefore all go off on rest days at the same time, it is too early to say if this is a benefit to the community.

Unfortunately, the figures are not so readily available, either within the budget or in the Crime plan. We await a response to our queries from the Commissioner's Office.

Much the same criticism was raised to the refresh of the Crime Plan and this will have to come back to the Panel.

There are several complaints being dealt with by the Panel some of them fairly long running and complicated.

To help us deal with the Crime Plan various members have Link roles with parts of the Plan and report back during the year to inform the Committee in its decision making.

We recently held a development day which the main topic was serious violence and knife crime. You would be partly right in thinking this is mainly an Urban problem and the main gang activities are indeed in Bristol, but the presence of 'County Lines' for drug dealing has brought it much closer to home and is an ever growing problem in our market towns.

It is a somewhat frustrating role to be a Panel member as they were set up very much as an afterthought to the role of Commissioners and even 6 years into the process there is very little guidance or strengthening of the role. Our enquiries nationally reveal that all the Panels operate differently, some are in open revolt, some just meet and agree some never see their Chief Constable etc. We are not in that position but the Panel is clearly frustrated in its efforts to properly scrutinise.

Martin Wale
Chairman Avon and Somerset Police and Crime Panel