

31st August 2023

Cllr Heather Shearer
Chair, Police & Crime Panel

Dear Heather,

Panel Review of the PCC Annual Report 2022/23

Thank you for your letter of 14 July 2023 setting out the Panel's views and recommendations on my Annual Report for 2022/23. I am pleased to provide a response to the points raised below.

1. HMICFRS PEEL Assessment

I welcome the Panel's intention to establish a Public Confidence Sub-Committee to support and challenge progress against work underway to understand and address the challenge of public confidence in policing. The issue of public confidence in policing is complex and broad in scope, involving multiple strands of work at a national and local level. The Areas for Improvement identified in the recent HMICFRS PEEL Assessment form an important part of understanding and addressing the position in Avon and Somerset. I know that my team is supporting the Panel in work to map out work underway to inform scoping and development of the Terms of Reference for the Public Confidence Sub-Committee to enable the Panel to focus their scrutiny work effectively and add value.

2. Preventing and Fighting Crime (Priority 1)

I am pleased to confirm that an assurance report on crime prevention will be presented to the September meeting as requested.

I welcome recognition by the Panel that prevention and problem solving are the responsibility of a number of partner agencies. Building effective partnership working is an important part of my role, including through engagement with Community Safety Partnerships (CSPs), our work in facilitating the A&S Violence Reduction Partnerships, the Reducing Reoffending Board, the Combatting Drugs Partnerships, as well as provision of funding to CSPs through the Police and Crime Grant and grass-roots community groups through the Commissioner's Prevention Fund. Many Panel Members will be directly involved in these partnership arrangements at a local level and I look forward to exploring your insight into how well these are working at a local level and how we can work together to overcome any barriers.

Neighbourhood Policing continues to play a central role in prevention and partnership working at a local level. An overview of the core duties of Neighbourhood Policing Teams will be provided at the September meeting. With regard to the strategy for reassignment of neighbourhood officers to manage demands for service, Operation Hibiscus, established to manage increased summer demand, is running from 7 June to 29 September. This involves a whole-team approach to meet increased demand. A key change for this summer, and in response to feedback from last year, is that Neighbourhood Policing officers will continue to work within their neighbourhood policing areas and will not be deployed outside of their local policing area.

3. Oversight of the Budget / Review of the Precept

I welcome the shared recognition at the challenge ahead in balancing the budget and finding savings to match a growing deficit up to £19m by 2027/28. The proposal for the Panel to establish a Budget Task Group to support oversight of the budget and precept-setting processes for 2024/25 is welcome, and my team and I look forward to working with its members over the coming months.

With regard to the Panel's concerns at the allocation of 80 staff to identify and record missed crime, it is important to offer clarification. The team responsible for identifying and recording missed crime is the 'RESCUE' team, comprising of 6 members of staff, within the Incident Assessment Unit. The team was established as a pilot during the past year as part of ongoing work to address areas of improvement required in relation to data integrity. The Incident Assessment Unit itself has a much broader role, responsible for checking that crimes identified by the call handler are compliant, as well as carrying out a significant amount of desktop investigation.

4. Engaging, Supporting and Working with Communities and Partner Organisations (Priority 2)

I acknowledge the Panel's observation that the encouraging progress made by Bluestone in increasing positive outcomes for rape and serious sexual offences from 4.7% to 8% is not good enough. I am pleased to confirm that the Annual Report has been amended to this effect.

I wholeheartedly agree with the Panel's position with regard to the importance of education and prevention in tackling misogyny and influencing the views of men and boys in our communities. Our work in this area is covered in the Male Violence Against Women and Girls section of the Annual Report, with details of projects funded through the Home Office Safer Streets Round 4 as one such example.

I am pleased to report a significant improvement in the situation regarding waiting times to access specialist sexual violence therapeutic services. The waiting time for the adult therapeutic service has reduced from an average of 20+ months under the previous contract to an average of 4-5 months under the new contract. The Children and Young Peoples service has a 2-3 month wait for an initial meeting, and waiting times ranging from less than 4 weeks for 12 sessions of 1:1 online therapy, up to 5 months for 24 sessions of 1:1 in-person therapy. These improvements have been achieved through four elements:

- Introduction of the new co-commissioned forcewide all-age service model on 1 April 2023;
- Additional investment from local partners including one-off funding of £100k from the OPCC over and above the annual contribution to mitigate changes in central funding allocation;
- Waiting list management including access to a new four-week online course at the point of referral to offer psychological support while on the waiting list;
- Impact of the Pathfinder Project, commissioned by NHS England in June 2022 to deliver an Early Trauma Intervention service.

I am pleased to be able to share an update in relation to the impact of the Domestic Abuse Matters training, which saw 2,405 frontline staff receiving training between September 2022 and March 2023. Post-delivery evaluation conducted by SafeLives was overwhelmingly positive, with 76% of first responders felt the training would have a positive impact on how they perform their role. Domestic Abuse performance data provides encouraging early indications of improvement in key areas with the DA Matters programme likely to be a contributing factor. While this more recent data will not feature in the 2022/23

Annual Report, I am pleased to share with you that:

- 22.6% of DA crimes have resulted in an arrest in Q1 of 2023/24 compared to an average of 18.7% over the previous 6 quarters.

- Controlling and Coercive Behaviour made up 5.4% of DA crime in Q1 of 2023/24 compared to an average of 4.8% for the previous 6 quarters.
- Positive outcome rates in Q1 of 2023/24 were 10.7% compared to an average of 9.3% over the previous 6 quarters.
- There has been a significant decrease in DASH non-compliance rates – 8.5% this quarter compared to an average of 14.4% for the previous 6 quarters.

Further rounds of training are currently being planned.

As I outlined at the June meeting, the cultural change required to challenge and address the behaviours that fall within the definition of institutional racism is a journey that will take a number of years. In relation to the Panel's request for an evidence-based approach to the issue, this is provided at a local level by the Identifying Disproportionality in the Avon and Somerset Criminal Justice System report, available at the following link for the benefit of new members:

[Identifying-Disproportionality-Report.pdf \(avonandsomerset-pcc.gov.uk\)](https://www.avonandsomerset-pcc.gov.uk/Identifying-Disproportionality-Report.pdf)

As Panel Members will be aware, the past year has focused on putting in place the structures and funding to take forward recommendations. The coming year will see focus shift towards delivery against measurable outcomes, with support and challenge coming from an independent scrutiny board. I will continue to keep Panel Members informed of progress with this important piece of work. On the specific recommendation that my strategy to tackle racism and support of the Chief Constable should be made front and centre in the Annual Report, this point is covered under Priority 4 within the Annual Report. I confirm that this section has been amended to make specific reference to Institutional Racism in response to the recommendation of the Panel.

I acknowledge that the announcement regarding Institutional Racism has been a difficult and challenging message, which whilst welcomed by communities who recognise this as their lived experience, has given potential cause for concern for others. Opportunities for staff members to share views and speak directly to senior leaders have taken place to understand and help address any concerns. Positive proactive communications are being used to recognise the contribution that individuals make through their day to day work, celebrate excellence, and to share positive feedback received by members of the public. This will continue to be developed following the appointment of the new Constabulary Director of Communications and Engagement. Finally, I am pleased to report that two community events were held during August, bringing together members of the community representing diverse communities to share experiences in relation to stop and search. These are people from the community who had directly expressed an interest in response to the communications about Institutional Racism. The Chief Constable's public declaration in recognising the problem of institutional racism gave communities the confidence that their experiences are recognised and taken seriously, opening the door to work together to address the challenges.

My team is working to map out the assurance measures we have in place against the various strands of work both to inform the scope of the Public Confidence Sub-Committee and to enable the Panel to be confident that tangible progress is being made.

5. Leading the Police to be Efficient and Effective (Priority 3)

Thank you for highlighting the anomaly in relation to the number of internal audit inspections carried out. I confirm that this has been amended.

Details of the limited assurance opinions can be found on p289 of the Internal Auditors Annual Report which is available at the following link: [21st-June-2023-Joint-Audit-Committee-Papers-For-Publication.pdf \(avonandsomerset-pcc.gov.uk\)](https://www.avonandsomerset-pcc.gov.uk/21st-June-2023-Joint-Audit-Committee-Papers-For-Publication.pdf) Limited assurance opinions were given in the following areas: Reasonable Adjustments; IT Service Desk; Management of Evidential Property.

6. Vetting of the Workforce

I am pleased to clarify that checks against the Police National Database (PND) did indeed include all officers and staff. Operation Holden required all police forces to submit all staff details through PND in order to check for any missed or adverse traces which could present a risk. The Avon and Somerset submission to the national PND team resulted in over 3,000 lines of data which required reviewing. Fewer than a dozen required a formal assessment, and the Constabulary was already aware of most of these. The Constabulary Professional Standards Department completed this mammoth task two months ahead of their deadline, which is testament to the priority being given to ensuring that vetting arrangements are robust. As the Panel has recognised, this is an important aspect of public confidence.

7. Reducing the negative Environmental Impact whilst maintaining Operational Efficiency

I am pleased to be able to provide a positive update in response to the Panel's recommendation with regard to electrification of fleet. The ability to reduce the number of diesel cars by swapping to hybrid/electric is constrained by the current national contract which offers only limited hybrid/electric options. The new contract has been delayed until 2024. In the interim, Forces are able to procure at a local level. As such, the Constabulary has worked with the South West Police Procurement Service (SWPPS) to identify alternative options which are affordable, suitable and support the decarbonisation ambition. Proposed purchases mean that the Constabulary now expect to be able to achieve hybrid in at least 70-80% of cases and surpass the 2027 30% ambition. SWPPS are also leading work on electric vehicle charging infrastructure, particularly rapid charge.

8. Police and Crime Plan

The Panel observed that some measures set out in the Police and Crime Plan have not been included in the annual report. This is due to the right data not being currently available. My team is continuing to work with Constabulary and partner colleagues to address gaps and issues identified in order to be able to include further measures in the future. One such example is work to resolve issues identified in data through the Constabulary Qlik App to support the road safety measure Killed and Seriously Injured. I confirm that this does not indicate a shift in priorities and that there are no plans to refresh the plan, pending the forthcoming PCC Election in May 2024.

I am grateful for the offer of Panel Members to assist in 'de-policing' the language of the report and making it more accessible. I am aware that my team has already made contact with you directly to take up this offer.

May I finish by expressing my thanks to you and to the Panel for your continued support and challenge. I look forward to continuing to work with the Panel over the coming year.

Fare thee well,



Mark Shelford

Police and Crime Commissioner
for Avon and Somerset