

7th October 2024

Councillor Heather Shearer
Chair
Police and Crime Panel, Avon & Somerset

Dear Heather

Thank you for your letter of 25 July 2024 setting out the Police and Crime Panel's response to the PCC Annual Report 2023/24. I am grateful for the feedback received to enable my team to finalise and publish the PCC Annual Report which covered the final year of tenure under the previous PCC. It was very helpful to listen to the perspectives of Panel Members both in response to the Annual Report and on the priorities for my term of office and in advance of the launch consultation on the new Police and Crime Plan. I look forward to working together in our respective roles going forward.

I am pleased to respond to the specific points raised in your letter below.

Public Trust and Confidence in the Police

I fully acknowledge the challenge faced not only in Avon and Somerset, but nationally, in the decline in public trust and confidence in the police service. Panel Members will have heard about the proactive and courageous leadership from the Chief Constable and her team to address these challenges head on. She has my full support in this, and I will continue to hold her to account on behalf of the community, in particular through Police Question Time and my Governance and Scrutiny Board in particular.

Public trust and confidence is a golden thread running through the delivery of the priorities in my new Police and Crime Plan. I welcome your observations at the need to ensure that each priority has an explanation for how its ambitions will contribute to improving public trust and confidence.

The need for the public to feel confident in reporting crimes is fundamental, as you have observed. In addition to my roles in holding the Chief Constable to account and as Chair of the Local Criminal Justice Board, addressing performance across the criminal justice system, I will work with our commissioned victim services to understand victim experiences, break down barriers to reporting and support victims on their journey. Specific focus groups are being held to seek views on the Reducing Male Violence against Women and Girls strand of my new Plan and how to deliver against this priority. Thank you for your helpful suggestion that non-violent technology-based abuses are considered alongside physical abuses. This has been fed into the consultation process.

Neighbourhood Policing

As I outlined at the June meeting, Strengthening Neighbourhood Policing is the first of the five priorities in my new Police and Crime Plan, the detail of which is currently under consultation. I was elected on this mandate and have heard loud and clear from communities across Avon and Somerset about the importance of visible policing and the value of neighbourhood teams. I do not underestimate the challenge of delivering against this priority, particularly against the backdrop of limited resources across both the police and partner agencies. The focus for consultation on my new Police and Crime Plan is to ask for ideas on how we can collectively make this happen in all parts of the Force area, from the rural reaches of Somerset to inner city Bristol. It will of course be a key area for scrutiny moving forward.

On your specific points regarding PCSO numbers, details have been shared with the Panel in the response to actions from the June meeting. The Chief Constable will continue to share regular updates with the Panel on progress of the ten operations formed in the wake of Operation Hemlock across the Force area, now known as Operation Harmony.

Engaging with Communities

I share your concern at the need to ensure that the business community is consulted on the Police and Crime Plan and approach to tackling business crime, and to maintain an open dialogue between the police and business owners. The issues you highlight mirror the concerns I have heard as I have spoken to business owners during my summer engagement programme and attended my first meeting of the Business Crime Forum. The issues of reporting and ensuring a prompt and effective response will be a focus for scrutiny under the Improving Standards in Policing priority under my new Police and Crime Plan, the details of which are currently under consultation.

Regarding investment in Special Constables, I share your desire to ensure that this issue is monitored to ensure the retention of these key roles, whilst balancing the need to retain a focus on recruitment and training of police officers to meet uplift targets. Figures relating to current levels of Special Officers and which area or department they are serving in have been shared with Panel Members in actions from the June meeting.

Public Investment and Value for Money

I fully acknowledge the challenge you raise in reconciling the need to request precept levels to maximum permitted levels year on year with positive outcome rates. The relationship between precept increases and specific areas of performance is complex. In both 2023 and 2024 the precept increases partially mitigated the low level of grant increase and it was made clear that real cuts would still be required. The £13 precept increase from April 2024 did come with an undertaking from the Chief Constable in respect of additional visible community policing, but this would not be reflected in the performance statistics in this annual report which covers the prior year. These issues warrant a broader discussion of the influences at play in the context of increasingly constrained resources. The Informal Budget Briefing on 26 November will be an important opportunity for Panel Members to engage in these discussions as we move towards the budget and precept setting process for the coming year.

I will of course keep the Panel sighted on the outcomes of the PEEL inspection taking place in September and assurance in responding to areas for improvement. I look forward to working with the Panel in the spirit of openness and constructive support and challenge as we carry out our respective roles in striving to make our communities safer.

Yours sincerely



Clare Moody
Police and Crime Commissioner
for Avon and Somerset

