

To: City Executive Board

Date: 6 April 2017

Report of: Scrutiny Committee

Title of Report: Thames Valley Police and Crime Panel

Summary and Recommendations

Purpose of report: To present the recommendations of the Scrutiny Committee on Thames Valley Police and Crime Panel

Scrutiny Lead Member: Councillor Andrew Gant, Chair of Scrutiny

Executive lead member: Councillor Dee Sinclair, Board Member for Community Safety

Recommendation of the Scrutiny Committee to the City Executive Board:

That the City Executive Board states whether it agrees or disagrees with the three recommendations set out in the body of this report.

Background

1. The Scrutiny Committee considered the work of the Thames Valley Police and Crime Panel at a meeting on 28 February 2017. The Committee would like to thank Councillor Dee Sinclair and Clare Gray, Police and Crime Panel Scrutiny Officer, for attending the meeting to present the report and answer questions.

Findings and recommendations

2. The Board Member for Community Safety and Oxford City Council's representative on Thames Valley Police and Crime Panel (PCP) presented the report. She explained that the PCP existed to scrutinise the work of the Police and Crime Commissioner (PCC) for Thames Valley, who attended every PCP meeting with the Chief Constable. The PCP consisted of 18 councillors from across the Thames Valley region, mostly Conservatives, and 2 independents with backgrounds in victim support and cybercrime. The PCP was funded by a £65k grant from the Home Office and had one dedicated member of staff.

3. The Board Member said that PCC had recently appointed Matt Barber, Leader of the Vale of White Horse District Council, as Deputy PCC but the PCP had not yet been informed of Mr Barber's specific responsibilities. The idea of having Associate PCCs had also been floated and it was possible that these would have a specific geographical focus.
4. The Police and Crime Panel Scrutiny Officer, said the Thames Valley Police budget had reduced by £88m over 6 years, an overall saving of 25%, at a time when crime was changing and becoming more complex. As a result, police assets were being reviewed and St. Aldate's police station in Oxford could be closed, with proviso that there was still a city centre police presence.
5. The Board Member for Community Safety said she used the PCP as an opportunity to inform the PCP and the representatives from the other local authorities of the issues faced in the city, e.g. safeguarding and human trafficking. However the PCP's powers were limited by legislation and the PCP could only bring things to the attention of the PCC. The PCP felt that they were hampered by legislation whereas the PCC thought the PCP were limited by resourcing constraints.
6. In response to a question the Committee heard that there were few tangible examples of the PCP having influenced the PCC. The PCP had recently held a themed meeting where they had looked at taxi licensing issues across the Thames Valley and discussed the need for a regional database. The PCC was trying to raise the issues of the taxi licensing regime at the national level but the attendees were unaware of the PCC having successfully influenced national policing, although he was engaged in a number of national groups. The PCC was able to set the local policing agenda through his Police and Crime Plan. A new plan would be launched in April but to date there had been no consultation on it. The Committee commented that the PCC should be encouraged to consult on his emerging plan.

Recommendation 1 – That the Council encourages the Thames Valley Police and Crime Commissioner to publicise and consult on his new Police and Crime Plan.

7. The Committee heard that the PCP met in Aylesbury 6 times a year and most meetings were themed. The Committee asked whether meetings could be held in different locations across the Thames Valley and perhaps include a focus on more local issues. The Police and Crime Panel Scrutiny Officer said that this had happened originally and that one meeting had been held in Oxford. However, this had required some members of the PCP to travel a long way to meetings so the PCP had settled on Aylesbury on the basis that it was fairly central.

Recommendation 2 – That the PCP are asked to look again at rotating meetings around the Thames Valley area to encourage public engagement and focus on local issues.

8. In response to a question the Committee heard that there was very limited public engagement in the PCP, with only one member of the public having attended any

meeting to date. This may be reflective the fact that the powers available to the PCP were very limited. The Committee considered how public engagement could be encouraged and suggested that he Council could help to promote meetings through its own media channels.

Recommendation 3 – That consideration is given to whether the Council could help to raise awareness of the PCP e.g. by publicising meetings of the PCP through Council media channels.

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