

6th National Conference for Police and Crime Panels

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1. Plenary Session

The session was in two parts, the first being a wide ranging discussion on a variety of relevant topics led by an expert Panel including the Chair of the South Yorkshire Police and Crime Panel, the Police and Crime Commissioner for Hertfordshire and the Chief Executive of the Centre for Public Scrutiny.

The points raised included;

- (i) Whether Panels are effective is really down to the culture and leadership of individual Panels not the legal powers that Panels have.
- (ii) The importance of Panels forging good working relationships with the leaders of relevant local authorities and Community Safety Partnerships.
- (iii) The need for Panels to reflect honestly upon their own performance in order to identify where they could/should be more effective in holding their Commissioner to account
- (iv) Making greater use of communication with the public as a means of influencing Commissioners
- (v) The publication of an annual report by Panels setting out what they have done during the year.
- (vi) That having a too 'familiar' a relationship between the scrutineer and the scrutinised weakens the effectiveness of the scrutiny process. Constructive tension between Panels and Commissioners is a 'good thing'.
- (vii) That the public are always interested in public safety if they are engaged with in a meaningful way on the issues that actually matter to them.
- (viii) There is a need for Panels to recognise that the role of Commissioners is much wider than just policing. It also includes criminal justice and community safety. Panels should not ignore these aspects of the Commissioner's role.
- (ix) Whilst conflict between the Panel and Commissioner is unhelpful, there is a big difference between conflict and robust scrutiny.

- (x) The emphasis of Panels should be on holding Commissioners to account regarding what they have said they are going to do in their Police and Crime Plan. Are they actually doing it and is it actually working.
- (xi) Panels should be very careful in assisting Commissioners in policy formulation as it risks undermining their ability to scrutinise effectively. It would be difficult for a Panel to scrutinise a policy it had a hand in developing.

The second part of the plenary session focussed on the proposed formation of a National Association of Police and Crime Panels. Following the consultation exercise earlier in the year delegates were advised that the overwhelming majority of Panels were in favour of forming a special interest group (SIG) under the auspices of the Local Government Association (LGA). It was recognised that this placed the Welsh panels in a difficult situation as Welsh authorities are not directly members of the LGA and Panels may not be able to use their Home Office grant to pay the required membership fee. (N.B. the Welsh Panels subsequently met later in the day to discuss their response to this).

A steering group will therefore be formed to take this forward.

2. Workshop – Reform of Police Complaints handling. (Cllr W D Powel)

This workshop was led by Norfolk Police and Crime Panel, who provided a briefing on the changes to the Police complaints process contained in the Policing and Crime Act 2017. Delegates then discussed the implications of these changes for both Commissioners and Panels.

3. Workshop – Regional Collaboration. (Cllr K Evans)

This workshop was led by Derbyshire Police and Crime Panel and focussed on how Panels scrutinise collaborative working undertaken or permitted by their Commissioners. In particular the workshop examined;

- (i) How Panels received information about collaborative activities

- (ii) How Panels held Commissioners to account over the governance of those activities
- (iii) How Panels performance manage their Commissioner over those activities, including financial monitoring
- (iv) How Panels influence their Commissioner on collaboration activities
- (v) How Panels support and challenge their Commissioner on collaboration activities

4. Workshop – Performance monitoring of Police and Crime Plans (Prof. I Roffe)

This workshop was led by Wiltshire Police and Crime Panel who have worked with their Commissioner to develop a system of performance monitoring to be used by both the PCC and PCP and which allows the latter to effectively monitor the effectiveness of the local Police and Crime Plan. Attached as Appendix A is a briefing document provided to delegates regarding this.

5. Workshop – Budget scrutiny (R J Edgecombe)

This workshop was led by Cleveland Police and Crime Panel who have formed a dedicated sub-group to scrutinise both the Commissioner's and force budgets throughout the year. The sub-group then provides a detailed report to the full Panel as part of its deliberations on the precept every January. A similar approach is taken by other Panels including Hampshire and West Mercia. The following points were emphasised;

- (i) It is difficult for Panels to make truly informed decisions regarding the precept if they have not undertaken proper budget monitoring/scrutiny during the year.
- (ii) It is desirable for Panels to receive financial advice independent of the Commissioner/Force Chief Finance Officers so that they are able to robustly challenge assumptions made.

- (iii) Panels should ask for financial information to be provided 'in plain English' and in a format easily understood not just by Panel members but also by the wider public.
- (iv) The general view was that Joint Audit Committees were not proving to be sufficiently robust to challenge Commissioners on these issues.
- (v) A more pro-active approach to budget scrutiny/monitoring in both Cleveland and Hampshire has proved effective in securing changes in approach by the respective Commissioners.

A copy of the Workshop papers are attached at Appendix B, including examples of the reports prepared in Cleveland.

6. All-Wales Forum

Delegates representing the South Wales, North Wales and Dyfed-Powys Panels then met to discuss issues of relevance to them. The key issues discussed included;

- (i) Formulating a welsh response to the creation of a LGA Police and Crime Panel SIG – whilst it was agreed that it was important to develop a unified welsh voice, concern was expressed that many forces collaborated closely with English counterparts and therefore care should be taken not to lose this dimension by focussing too much on an all – wales approach. Concern was also expressed whether the WLGA were sufficiently committed to supporting a welsh SIG and how that would link in with its LGA counterpart. It was agreed that the Chair of the South Wales Panel would look to arrange a meeting with the Chairs of all 4 Panels and the WLGA to take matters forward.
- (ii) Relationship between Panels and Joint Audit Committees – several Panels have now sent observers to JAC meetings and the overall view was that they were not robust enough to provide effective challenge.