

## **Overview & Scrutiny Committee – Meeting held on Wednesday, 15th February, 2023.**

**Present:-** Councillors Gahir (Chair), Matloob (Vice-Chair), Akbar, Basra, P. Bedi, Kaur and M. Malik

**Also present under Rule 30:-** Councillors Ajaib, Hulme, Muvvala, Strutton and Swindlehurst

**Apologies for Absence:-** Councillors Bal and S. Malik

### **PART I**

#### **37. Declarations of Interest**

No interests were declared.

#### **38. Presentation from the Thames Valley Police and Crime Commissioner and the Chief Constable**

The Committee welcomed to the meeting the Thames Valley Police & Crime Commissioner (PCC), Matthew Barber; the Chief Constable John Campbell QPM of Thames Valley Police (TVP); and Superintendent Lee Barnham, the LPA Commander for Slough.

The PCC gave an overview of his priorities for the coming year. It was noted that the force was on course to over-achieve on its recruitment target with 80 additional officers joining, which would support the focus on community policing. A range of initiatives were in place to improve responsiveness, for example new technology being introduced to enhance the 101 service and better updates to the victims of crime. The PCC explained the significant progress that was being made on a Thames Valley wide CCTV network, including working closely with Slough Borough Council to be one of the first to make the transition from a local authority to police run service from the start of 2024. Tackling knife crime was a key issue for Slough and PCC highlighted that police enforcement was only one part of a much wider community and partner effort that was required to change attitudes and behaviours. It was welcome that the Knife Angel initiative had recently been to Slough and it had been a focal point for a significant amount of engagement with the local community.

The Chief Constable gave a comprehensive presentation on the work of Thames Valley Police over the past year and future priorities. The following issues were highlighted during the presentation:

- TVP was currently consulting on a new structure. The Chief Constable emphasised that retaining a 'local feel' to policing was an important priority and that TVP was committed to localism, scrutiny and joint working.

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- Mr Campbell would be retiring as Chief Constable at the end of March and Jason Hogg, who was currently deputy chief constable, had been promoted to the role.
- The force had 4,861 Police Officers in October 2022, plus 288 community support officers and 229 special constables. The aim was to recruit an extra 609 Police Officers. Good progress had been made on the recruitment of more female officers and those from ethnic minority backgrounds, although it was recognised that more still needed to be done to ensure the workforce reflected the communities TVP served.
- A summary of key trends was provided covering the first half of the year. A particular focus on improving outcomes regarding crimes such as domestic abuse, rape and sexual offences had resulted in significant increases in the number of such crimes resulting in formal action.
- The average response time for calls to 101 was approximately 4 minutes, which was a good level of performance compared to other forces but the Chief Constable stated that wait times still needed to be further reduced.
- The work of TVP on a range of other projects and activities was noted, particularly Operation London Bridge for which the Committee commended the force on the exemplary organisation that had been put in place.

Supt Barnham provided an update on local performance and other key issues. There had been no overall change in the levels of recorded crime in the past year, although there were variations in the figures relating to certain offences. For example, burglary had fallen 11% but reported cases of domestic abuse had increased, which was to be welcomed so that such offences could be properly addressed. The work the Police and partners was doing to tackle knife crime and drug offences was outlined, including Operation Concept which had resulted on 178 searches and a significant number of arrests. Six hot spots had been identified in the town and there had been 1,400 patrols since September 2022. The Knife Angel had resulted in 8,000 interactions and 50 educational sessions held during the period it was in Slough.

The Committee asked a range of questions of the PCC, Chief Constable and Supt Barnham. Councillors Hulme, Strutton and Muvvala also spoke under Rule 30. The discussion is summarised as follows:

- Members welcomed the Knife Angel initiative and agreed that working together to raise awareness and engagement was crucially important. It was asked whether there were plans for further such initiatives for Slough. The PCC concurred that the Knife Angel provided a talking point for the community to come together and that he would continue to work with local authorities on future initiatives. Home Office funding had been secured for work on homicide prevention for example. It was noted that Thames Valley had some of the lowest levels of violent crime in the country.

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- Several issues regarding police officer numbers and recruitment were raised. Members asked whether the new officers would fully replace those lost since 2010; how many of the new officers would be based in Slough; and what work was being undertaken to increase recruitment from ethnic minority backgrounds. The number of officers was higher than 3 years ago but remained lower than 2010. The Chief Constable commented that the force would ideally want more officers across the Thames Valley than it currently had resources to provide, but the increase in recent years was welcome. The force regularly made the case to the Home Office for more funding and it was noted that the police funding formula resulted in several other areas which had smaller populations had more officers than Thames Valley Police. There had been 147 recruits from BAME communities recently and this equated to 15% of recruits, which was broadly in line with the 16% BAME population of those economically active in the Thames Valley. The Chief Constable recognised that more needed to be done, but that progress was being made.
- Members asked about the impact on Slough of the TVP review of its structure. The Chief Constable assured Members that local accountability and community policing would still be central to the forces' priorities. Local engagement would remain key and councillors were encouraged to contribute to the consultation.
- The Committee asked about the difficulties in recruiting and retaining PCSOs. It was noted that the TVP budget for PCSOs was 430 and there were 288 in post. The Chief Constable stated that PCSOs had an important role to play and TVP would continue to try to recruit. The starting salary for PCSPs was circa £29,000 and it was a very rewarding role. There were a number of factors involved, including the impacts of the uplift programme for Police Officers on PCSO recruitment. TVP did face wider recruitment challenges given the fact that pay in the Metropolitan Police was higher.
- Members asked about the approach TVP was taking to address the wider public concerns about racism and sexism in the police following several high profile examples in other police forces. The PCC highlighted the importance of setting the right culture within TVP and encouraged officers and the public to report concerns. The Chief Constable commented that good recruitment processes and vetting were important for new officers joining the force.
- In relation to the responsiveness of the Police the Committee asked about the practical steps to improve the 101 wait time and to better communicate with victims of crime to keep them updated of the progress of their cases. It was reiterated that TVPs response times compared favourably with other forces and they were committed to further improving performance.

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- The Chair highlighted the relatively high proportion of violent offences, particularly in Slough, and expressed concerns about the impact of this on the reputation of the town. The Chief Constable commented on the issues contributing to perceptions of crime, but highlighted that crime levels were not as negative as often perceived and that the Community Safety Partnership would have extensive data and information available which the Committee may find helpful to provide context.
- The issues of joint working with neighbouring forces and partnership working to secure prosecutions was discussed. Supt Barnham explained the process that took place and provided assurance that forces did work together on cross-border cases. The PCC chaired the Local Criminal Justice Board which brought together the police, CPS, HM Courts and Tribunal Service, Probation, Youth Offending Service and others. He described the joint work they undertook including in relation to victim care.
- The role of the community safety partnership (Safer Slough Partnership) in engaging with councillors and the community was raised. This prompted a discussion about the most effective ways to engage residents and communities in Slough and it was agreed it was an issue Members may wish to pick up directly with the Safer Slough Partnership following the meeting.

Members asked a number of other specific questions about issues such as missing persons, Safer Streets Fund, traffic collision data, educational initiatives and mental health emergencies. Supt Barnham stated that he would provide some information to the committee on the percentage of call outs involving individuals in mental health distress. In response to a question about TVPs view on the Council's proposal for a streetlight dimming trial, Supt Barnham commented that the police would monitor crime data and input that information to the Council as part of their evaluation of the trial.

At the conclusion of the discussion the Committee thanked the PCC, Chief Constable and Supt Barnham for their attendance at the meeting and to them and Thames Valley Police more widely for the work they did in Slough. The Chair also proposed a vote of thanks to Mr Campbell for his service to the town given that this would be his final meeting with the Council prior to his retirement in March 2023. The Committee agreed a vote of thanks.

The report and presentation was then noted.

### **Resolved –**

- (a) That the report and presentation on crime and policing issues in Slough be noted.
- (b) That the Chief Constable be thanked for his services to policing ahead of his retirement in March 2023.

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### **39. Members' Attendance Record 2022/23**

**Resolved** – That the Members' attendance record be noted.

### **40. Date of Next Meeting - 23rd February 2023**

The date of the next meeting was confirmed as 23<sup>rd</sup> February 2023.

Chair

(Note: The Meeting opened at 6.30 pm and closed at 9.03 pm)