

Devon and Cornwall Police Authority

MINUTES

A meeting of the **Community Engagement Committee** was held on 11 September 2008 in the Conference Room, Endeavour House, Woodwater Park, Exeter starting at 10.20am.

Present:

Chairman Mrs A Malcolm
Members: Mr M Bull, Mrs L Dunn, Mr M Hicks, Mrs J Owen and Mr C Wallin.

Officers in Attendance: -

Police Authority Miss A Buisman (Policy Officer), Mr R Martin (Policy Officer) and Ms J Norris (Assistant Chief Executive)[item 9 only].

Constabulary Assistant Chief Constable P Netherton (Territorial Policing) and Ms A Poole (Head of Performance and Analysis)

The Chairman welcomed those people viewing this Webcast.

PC/274 Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were received from Mr G Hicks and Mr B Preston.

PC/275 Declarations of Interests

No declarations of interest were made in respect of any item on the agenda.

PC/276 Chairman's Announcement

There were no Chairman's announcements.

PC/277 Minutes

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting held on 3 July 2008 were confirmed and signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

PC/268 – The Assistant Chief Constable spoke about the difficulties with applying the Special Priority Payments (SPP) to officers across the Force. It was recognised as a sensitive issue that would require further consideration and a formal strategy for future years.

Members reiterated that there appeared to be difficulties in recruiting Neighbourhood Beat Managers in parts of the Force due to the SPP being withdrawn for this role.

PC/278 Force Contact Strategy

The Assistant Chief Constable provided the Committee with an update on the development of a Contact Strategy for the Force. This contained elements of professional standards, engagement and contact with the public.

The Contact Strategy is being managed by the head of Territorial Policing Department. A series of initiatives were being developed to assist in improving the services delivered to the public by the Constabulary. This included:

- Examining initial demand into the call handling centres to better understand how this can be reduced and more efficiently managed.
- Exploring the possibilities of moving certain call handling operations to police stations across the Force, including routing calls directly to Station Enquiry Officers.

- Better use of the Force website to remove the need to ring the police for certain non-emergency issues.
- Enhance face-to-face contact between the police and the public by looking into the feasibility of mobile police stations, particularly in rural areas.
- The further use of the 'Red Times' and 'Red Zones' strategy – the deployment of officers to places and at times when they will have the greatest visible impact upon the public, for example outside schools and supermarkets.
- Better use of SMS texting.

The Assistant Chief Constable stressed that many of these proposals were heavily dependent on better IT infrastructure and software which required investment and time to introduce. Traditionally the links between police work and customer service excellence have not been strong. The Constabulary was now working to bring the two disciplines together. It was hoped that Project Mercury would be the basis for much improvement in the Force's IT capabilities.

Members emphasised the importance of call handling staff to improving the public's customer service experience. The Performance Management Committee also discussed the importance of making call handling staff feel valued and understanding the contribution they make to improving public confidence and satisfaction in the Force.

The Committee also urged the Constabulary to leave senior officers in post for long enough to bring about change. Too often in the past managers in the Call Management Department had been moved before they had a chance to make long-term improvements.

The Assistant Chief Constable advised Members the current head of the Call Management Department would be in this post for at least 3 years.

The Committee recognised that the Force had worked hard to improve the working environment within the call centres. A continued investment in the facilities and environment in which this part of the organisation works was needed to demonstrate to call handling staff that they are important and highly valued.

The Assistant Chief Constable stated that the Policing Pledge (which has been proposed in the Government's Green Paper on policing) and the Constabulary's new website, scheduled for launch in mid October, will help to improve the engagement officers have with the public and assist in embedding a customer service ethos further.

The Chairman thanked the Assistant Chief Constable for the update.

PC/279 Devon and Cornwall Panel Meeting Results

The Policy Officer (Community Engagement) introduced a report updating Members on the findings from the Panel meetings held in Exeter and Truro in June.

The findings from the two Panels showed there was a need for the police to better recognise the differences between the demands on rural and urban areas. Additionally, many people stated they were unaware of the non-emergency telephone number.

The Assistant Chief Constable stated that the Force already spends approximately 40% of its marketing budget on promoting the non-emergency telephone number and whether it was wise to increase this further. Recent initiatives included placing the number on the front cover on the Phone Book and looking into whether the number could be programmed into mobile phones sold in the Force area.

The Local Policing Summary, which had recently been circulated to all households in Devon, Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly, also contained contact telephone numbers for the police.

The Head of Performance and Analysis questioned whether representatives from the Force should be present at Panel meetings to advise on recent actions and developments within the Constabulary. The Chairman considered this not necessary. The Panels were seen as a way the Police Authority could take a snapshot to gauge public opinion, although recognised they were not necessarily representative.

Members urged the Force to make better use of the Community Messaging Service facility which operated via email, phone and fax. This is effectively self-managing and cost neutral and could reach a wide audience. The Chairman called for all Members to promote the Community Messaging Service at future Police Authority Liaison Meetings and for inclusion in the Members' Newsletter.

RESOLVED

That the actions in the report are endorsed recognising that the ability to include Partners and Communities Together (PACT) material in council tax leaflets was an issue for the Police Authority rather than the Force.

PC/280 University Consultation

Members were presented a report providing information of planned Police Authority consultation with the Universities of Plymouth and Exeter.

A debate was being planned between the Police Authority and the University of Exeter for late October.

Members were advised that the University of Exeter campus now had its own dedicated Neighbourhood Beat Manager with support from a Police Community Support Officer.

RESOLVED That the report be noted.

PC/281 Preliminary Results for Summer Consultation

The Policy Officer (Community Engagement) provided a brief overview of the preliminary results from the consultation events held by the Police Authority during the last few months.

The Kongomana event held at Bicton was aimed at 13 to 19 year olds.

Further results from the summer consultation events will be presented at the next Committee meeting.

RESOLVED That the report be noted.

PC/282 Draft PALM report

Members were provided with a draft revised version of the Police Authority Liaison Meeting (PALM) report for their consideration. This was called for at the last meeting of this Committee.

Whilst Members broadly welcomed the report, they were critical of the inclusion of the trend chart. It was felt that the chart was misleading and for that reason should be removed.

The Policy Officer indicated that the trend chart had been included at Members' request because they wished to know the issues that were of greatest importance to the public across a period of time. The report was not intended to be a scientific assessment of the issues raised at PALMs, such a report was not possible. Instead it was a broad indication of the strategic issues being raised by the public to enable the Committee to decide if any follow-up action was necessary.

This led to a discussion on the status of PALM meetings and their place alongside PACTs.

The Assistant Chief Executive stated that PALMs were just one element of the Police Authority's community engagement activity and that information gathered from PALMs would be used to develop wider consultation activity in the future.

The Chairman reminded Members that a discussion on PALMs and PACTs and how they complement each other would be held at the next Committee meeting.

RESOLVED That Members supported the revised format of the PALM report, subject to the removal of the trend chart.

The meeting closed at 1145 hours.