

AGENDA ITEM

REPORT TO CLEVELAND POLICE & CRIME PANEL

10 JUNE 2013

REPORT OF HEAD OF COMMUNITY PROTECTION

LGA CONFERENCE ON PCPs 21 MARCH 2013

SUMMARY

The purpose of this report is to provide the Panel with feedback from the LGA Conference on Police and Crime Panels.

RECOMMENDATION

That the report be noted.

DETAIL

1. On 21 March the Local Government Association (LGA) held a conference entitled 'Police & Crime Panels – reflections and insight from the first 139 days', which was attended by 70 delegates from at least 27 PCPs, and including Cllr Norma Stephenson OBE and Mike Batty on behalf of Cleveland PCP. The conference was free to LGA members, generating only travel and subsistence costs.
2. The opening session consisted of brief reflections from four PCP chairs from
 - Buckinghamshire;
 - Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland
 - West Yorkshire; and
 - West Sussex

These reflected a range of experiences depending on the political dynamics of the localities concerned and their PCC's political background, if any, and the temperaments of PCCs and PCP chairs. It was clear that in some areas there were far more difficult relationships between PCCs and PCPs than in Cleveland to date. A recurring theme was concern about whether the Home Office paradigm of a 'light touch' and four meetings per year would always be adequate to the responsibility of holding PCCs to proper account, and specifically about the level of resources and local support available to Panels. A second theme was about the potential for Panels to make effective use of the news media as a way of holding Commissioners to account.

3. A representative from the Centre for Public Scrutiny (CfPS) provided an input on 'what would a good Police & Crime Panel look like?', which was very general (e.g. "have a well prioritised and planned work programme") and the CfPS later collaborated with the LGA in a discussion on support provided to Panels, where there was general agreement that the various guidance documents issued by the LGA had been very valuable, and general

support for further conferences. After some debate on frequency, it was suggested that there should be two conferences per year, around May and November.

4. In the afternoon there were three workshop choices, with each delegate having the opportunity to attend two, as follows:
 - (a) Confirmation hearings – Cllr Stephenson; first session
 - (b) Complaints – Mike Batty, second session
 - (c) Scrutinising the Plan and precept – Mike Batty, first session and Cllr Stephenson, second session.
5. In the final feedback session, the three key points from each of the workshops were summarised as follows:-

Confirmation Hearings

- (i) In respect of Deputy PCCs, there had been a dearth of information about why they were appointed and what made them suitable for the role.
- (ii) There was some lack of clarity about the purpose of Panels undertaking confirmation hearings. Suffolk PCP approached this from the point of view of asking how they could add value to the appointment process, and asking about how the proposed Chief Constable would interact with the PCC, PCP and other partners.
- (iii) How will the Panels know when PCCs have taken key decisions (e.g. decision to extend Chief Constable contracts)?

Complaints

- (i) Some complaints are proving difficult and complex – about a third of participants had received complaints.
- (ii) Some Panels were regretting not having delegated complaints (but one delegate memorably described the idea of delegating the first level complaints handling to the PCC's office as being like "asking a rabbit to deliver a lettuce".)
- (iii) The process of handling complaints needs to be as solid as possible, so that historic complaints and complaints outside the scope of the Panel (e.g. those about the policies of PCCs as opposed to their conduct) can be nipped in the bud.

Scrutinising Plans and Precepts

- (i) Panels need support from experts on finance/budgets.
- (ii) Panels need agreement/protocols on timescale for receipt of details as early as possible (at least one Panel did not receive the details of budget and precept until the day of its meeting)
- (iii) Further thought needs to be given to how best to provide opportunity for public involvement.