

NORTHAMPTONSHIRE POLICE, FIRE & CRIME PANEL

REPORT TO THE POLICE, FIRE & CRIME COMMISSIONER FOR NORTHAMPTONSHIRE

8 JULY 2021

Report Title	Review of the Police, Fire & Crime Commissioner for Northamptonshire's Annual Report for 2020/21
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1. Purpose of Report

- 1.1. The report is intended to set out the results of the review by the Northamptonshire Police, Fire & Crime Panel of the Police, Fire & Crime Commissioner for Northamptonshire's Annual Report for 2020/21.

2. Executive Summary

- 2.1 The Police, Fire & Crime Commissioner for Northamptonshire is required to publish an Annual Report on their activity and their progress with the delivery of key strategic outcomes in the previous year. The Annual Report must be reviewed by the Northamptonshire Police, Fire & Crime Panel, resulting in the production of a report to the Commissioner.

3. Recommendations

- 3.1 It is recommended that the Police, Fire & Crime Commissioner for Northamptonshire:
- Considers this report by the Police, Fire & Crime Panel arising from its review of his Annual Report for 2020/21 carried out in accordance with the Police Reform & Social Responsibility Act 2011 Section 28(4).
 - Provides the Panel with a response to this report and its recommendations set out in section 6 in accordance with the Police Reform & Social Responsibility Act 2011 Section 12 Paragraph 4(a).

- 3.2 Reasons for Recommendation(s) – The recommendations are required to complete the Panel’s review of the Annual Report for 2020/21 published by the Police, Fire & Crime Commissioner, in accordance with the Panel’s statutory responsibilities.

4. Report Background

- 4.1 Sections 12 and 28 of the Police Reform & Social Responsibility Act 2011 specify that a Police & Crime Commissioner (PCC) must produce an annual report. The annual report must report on:
- a) the exercise of the PCC’s functions in the previous financial year, and
 - b) the progress which has been made in the financial year in meeting the police and crime objectives in the Police & Crime Plan.
- 4.2 The PCC must send an annual report to the relevant Police & Crime panel as soon as practicable after it is produced.
- 4.3 The Police & Crime panel must arrange a public meeting of the panel to be held as soon as practicable after the panel is sent the annual report.
- 4.4 The PCC must attend the panel meeting to present the report and to answer such questions from the panel about it as panel members think appropriate.
- 4.5 The panel must review the annual report and make a report or recommendations on it to the PCC. The report or recommendations of the panel must be published. The PCC must provide a response to the panel and must also publish that response.
- 4.6 Local Government Association (LGA) guidance for Police & Crime panels on policing and fire governance advises that scrutiny of the annual report should focus on the following areas:
- understanding whether the objectives set out in the Police & Crime Plan have been met
 - using panel members’ own insight and independently gathered evidence to evaluate whether the PCC’s conclusions on this matter are robust, and
 - supporting the PCC to hold the chief constable to account on operational delivery.

5. Review of the Annual Report

- 5.1 The Northamptonshire Police, Fire & Crime Panel met in public on 17th June 2021 to review the Police, Fire & Crime Commissioner for Northamptonshire’s Annual Report for 2020/21.
- 5.2 In presenting the Annual Report the Commissioner emphasised that the previous year had been dominated by the challenges resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic, the worst public health emergency to affect the country in 100 years. However, he had still worked to make the most of the resources available to Northamptonshire. Additional funding provided to Northamptonshire Police translated into the highest number of police officers since the 2000s, whilst

Northamptonshire Fire & Rescue Service (NFRS) had also been strengthened. This provided a basis for continuing improvement in both cases. The Chief Constable and Chief Fire Officer were also working together to share support services to maximise efficiency. The Commissioner thanked the team in the Office of the Police, Fire & Crime Commissioner (OPFCC) for their support and praised the dedication shown by force and NFRS staff members during the pandemic.

- 5.3 The Panel then questioned the Commissioner about the position presented in the Annual Report, in the context of the objectives and focus areas identified in the Commissioner’s Police & Crime Plan. The Panel considered the following matters:

Prevention and early intervention – increase support for the most vulnerable

- 5.4 A Panel member noted that the Annual Report identified the ambition to increase the force’s professional curiosity and knowledge of trauma-informed practice in support of this objective and questioned whether the need to take this action represented a concern. The Commissioner advised that this action linked back to the 2018/19 inspection of the force by Her Majesty’s Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services (HMICFRS), which had identified that it was not investigating crime effectively enough. In addition, the force had recruited nearly 500 officers in recent years. A considerable amount of work was therefore being done to ensure that the force was able to provide members of the public with an effective service at all stages from the reporting of a crime to the submission of a case to the Crown Prosecution Service. Trauma-informed practice involved taking a considered view of how previous trauma might affect the parties involved in an incident to support a more effective police response. Overall, the Commissioner was confident that Northamptonshire Police was now in a significantly better position than it had been when he took office. He had recently met with the family of David Brickwood concerning failings in the force’s investigation of his murder in 2015. The Commissioner considered that these failings would not occur now. The Commissioner also highlighted that in 2016 the number of overdue visits to people on the Management of Sexual Offenders & Violent Offenders register in Northamptonshire had been 600-700, which compared to around 50 now. This was another reflection of the progress made by the force in this time.

Prevention and early intervention – divert young people from crime

- 5.5 A Panel member referred to reports of increased referrals to social care services following the end of lockdown and questioned whether Youth Services were seeing similar demand. The Panel was advised that the Early Intervention team was currently receiving a higher number of cases but it was not yet possible to say whether this was due to the end of lockdown or other factors, such as new operating arrangements connected with the creation of the Northamptonshire Children’s Trust.
- 5.6 A Panel member welcomed the development of the Youth Commission by the OPFCC and questioned whether it was intended to be a long term project and whether it would be able to engage with young people in disadvantaged areas. The Panel was advised that both of these points applied. Youth Commission members were appointed through a formal recruitment process that operated every 12 months, which helped to broaden involvement.

Robust enforcement – increased accessibility and visibility in all communities

- 5.7 A Panel member welcomed that Northamptonshire Police was seeking to embed its services in local communities. The force needed to be a trusted source of help to members of the public. It was also important that different public sector organisations worked together as a single team to address complex issues such as knife crime. It was positive to see that this joined up approach was reflected in the Annual Report.
- 5.8 A member challenged whether it was planned to close Weston Favell police station and Moulton fire station. The case for this was questioned as they were located in a growing area that would require some alternative provision. The Commissioner clarified that the existing Weston Favell police station had been valued at approximately £1m but required remedial work on the roof that would cost more than this. There would continue to be a policing base in Weston Favell. Moulton fire station was not being closed: the adjacent headquarters and maintenance facilities were being relocated to Darby House and Earls Barton respectively. The Commissioner had made these plans known before the election in the interests of openness.
- 5.9 A Panel member encouraged the Commissioner to maximise the use of his Supporting Communities Fund to work with different community groups. The Commissioner emphasised that he was keen to look at all opportunities to use the grant schemes he controlled to work with local groups to address risks to communities. It was open to all groups to bid for funding.
- 5.10 A Panel member emphasised that visible uniformed policing was backed up a range of functions that were less obvious but essential, such as criminal investigation. The Commissioner was asked if he was confident in the effectiveness of these functions in Northamptonshire. The Commissioner responded that he had a continuing concern about the national Action Fraud function. He had requested information from the force about the number of cases being directed to it for investigation, as he was not certain that victims were well-served by the current national approach. The Commissioner agreed that support functions were a crucial element in the overall response to crime. The importance of maximising their effectiveness in Northamptonshire was behind the decisions to withdraw from Multi-Force Shared Services and to introduce the enabling services approach. The Commissioner subsequently re-iterated that the force had undertaken considerable training on investigative capability in the last three years, which should be reflected in the outcome of its next HMICFRS inspection.

Robust enforcement – modern slavery and exploitation

- 5.11 A Panel member questioned the robustness of action being taken to address modern slavery in Northamptonshire, referring to a case when a perpetrator had been penalised but had then resumed activity. The Panel member considered that more robust enforcement action should also be taken in cases where travellers occupied land. The Commissioner responded that the Annual Report was intended to be a strategic overview: he could discuss concerns about specific incidents separately with individual Panel members if they could provide details. He was satisfied that the force had sufficient focus on modern slavery, which had not been the case when he had

first taken office. The OPFCC had also set up a countywide partnership board on modern slavery and human trafficking, which was chaired by the OPFCC Director for Delivery.

- 5.12 A Panel member questioned why the 'Take a Closer Look' film commissioned by the OPFCC to raise awareness of modern slavery and exploitation was only directed at frontline professionals and not also used with members of the public. The Commissioner advised that a separate film designed for members of the public had just been produced.

Overall progress in meeting Police & Crime Plan objectives

- 5.13 A Panel member challenged the Commissioner that the Annual Report did not say enough about progress towards meeting his Police & Crime Plan objectives. The overall vision set out in the Police & Crime Plan was 'A Safer Northamptonshire'. LGA guidance encouraged that when the Panel reviewed the Annual Report it should consider whether Northamptonshire had become more safe over the past year. However, the Annual Report did not provide a basis for reaching a conclusion on this question. The Panel member highlighted that the Annual Report produced by the West Midlands PCC was one example of a PCC taking a more quantitative approach by presenting more data to back up their conclusions. The Commissioner was urged to emulate this approach in future.
- 5.14 The Commissioner emphasised in response that the presentation of performance information to the Panel was an area of previous discussion and the approach taken continued to evolve. In the year ahead he proposed to provide the Panel with a quarterly update on performance that would include appropriate narrative information. This reflected that performance information needed to be properly contextualised when presented in public, for example, to show that an increase in recorded crimes could reflect increased enforcement activity against that type of crime.
- 5.15 The Panel subsequently considered any conclusions or recommendations that it wished to reach on the Annual Report. Panel members welcomed examples of positive progress, such as the investment of £1.5m in local crime fighting initiatives and good joint working between the force and NFRS as part of the response to the pandemic. Different views were expressed about whether the Annual Report provided sufficient evidence of performance against key outcomes in the Police & Crime Plan. The Panel was reminded that the Annual Report represented the Commissioner's conclusions on progress: when reviewing it the Panel was able to comment on the robustness of these conclusions. The Commissioner noted that the outcome of the recent election also represented a judgement on his performance. He believed that the Panel would be satisfied with information on the delivery of Police & Crime Plan outcomes that could be provided to it in the year ahead.

6. Outcomes of the Review

- 6.1 At the conclusion of discussion the Panel resolved:

To accept the Police, Fire & Crime Commissioner's Annual Report for 2020/21.

7. Background Papers

Police Reform & Social Responsibility Act 2011

Northamptonshire Police, Fire & Crime Panel Terms of Reference.