

**Corporate Infrastructure & Regulatory Services
Scrutiny Committee**

Impact of Changes to
Local Policing
Spotlight Review:
Progress Report

March 2020

1. Impact of Changes to Local Policing Spotlight Review 2017

Background

1.1 In October 2017 the CIRS Scrutiny Committee held a Spotlight Review to investigate the potential impact of changes to local policing in Devon, which included a planned reduction in PCSOs (Police Community Support Officers) from 340 to 150 across Devon and Cornwall. These proposed changes formed part of Devon and Cornwall Police's 'Project Genesis', which was reviewing resource levels, definitions of roles in neighbourhood policing, training and the role of volunteers.

1.2 The scope of the 2017 Spotlight Review was to:

- Begin to identify and seek to quantify the impact that reductions in funding and changes to police, local authority and partner priorities and activities are having on local communities, local crime and anti-social behaviour
- Identify the value that PCSOs bring to communities and as such, consider the potential impact of planned reductions across the County
- Consider how Devon & Cornwall Police, public sector and third sector partners can work together to best protect communities into the future
- Feed the findings of the review into Devon & Cornwall Police's Project Genesis review

2017 Spotlight Review Recommendations

1.3 The Spotlight Review published its report in November 2017, making a number of recommendations which can be viewed in full [here](#). A summary of the recommendations is below:

1) That the Chief Constable should closely monitor the impact of his decision to reduce overall numbers of the workforce, and ensure that this does not result in less effective working in Neighbourhood teams, whilst making every effort to reconnect local policing with communities

2) That as part of Project Genesis, the Police undertake to identify the nature and number of incidents PCSOs are deployed to deal with and the effectiveness of PCSOs in detecting or apprehending crime and supporting of victims

3) Increase public understanding and trust in modern police work and how the Police in Devon are keeping communities safe

4) Make the most of volunteers and communities as a valuable asset

5) Working more effectively with public sector and voluntary sector partners

1.4 The report and recommendations were welcomed by both the Council's Cabinet and Devon and Cornwall's Chief Constable. At their committee meeting in June 2018, Scrutiny Members received an update from Devon and Cornwall Police on the progress of Project Genesis and changes made to local policing, the minutes of which are available [here](#).

1.5 In November 2019, Members met with Chief Superintendent Sam De Reya and Chief Superintendent Keith Perkin to understand and explore further the outcome of the Project Genesis work and changes to local policing over the last 18 months. The key messages from this meeting are outlined in this report.

2. Progress since the 2017 Spotlight Review

Project Genesis

2.1 Launched in March 2017, Project Genesis aimed to improve local policing within neighbourhoods and ensure that it would be effective and sustainable into the future. This included the proposal to dramatically reduce the number of PCSOs in Devon and Cornwall, which left many people feeling concerned about community safety and the future of neighbourhood policing in their communities.

2.2 Project Genesis brought a renewed focus on community policing, prevention and problem solving, ensuring that resources are allocated where they are most needed, including in rural areas. There was also a need to fully understand the work that Neighbourhood Beat Managers and PCSOs were undertaking and ensuring that this aligned with their distinct roles. Devon and Cornwall Police are clear that this approach has brought a strengthened commitment to neighbourhood policing across Devon and the wider peninsula.

Investing in local policing

2.3 A number of initiatives and new ways of working have been introduced since the 2017 Spotlight Review, including the creation of a Rural Crime Team which has a focus on issues particularly affecting rural communities including illegal raves, fly tipping and road safety. Eight additional Neighbourhood Beat Manager roles across Devon have also been created, alongside neighbourhood conferences and focussed training for neighbourhood teams.

2.4 There has also been investment in a range of new roles including police staff investigators and problem-solving roles which use analytical approaches in cases such as missing people. Incident Resolution Teams now alleviate some of the workload of frontline officers and innovative joint roles through collaboration with Devon & Somerset Fire & Rescue Service have been created; four PCFSO roles (based in the north of the County) combine the PCSO role with an on-call Firefighter role, and seven joint Community Responder roles combine the role of Special Constable with an on-call Firefighter.

Connecting with communities

2.5 Work is ongoing across the force to make improvements in the ways in which communities engage with the Police. The contact centre now uses integrated voice recognition software to signpost callers to the right call handler which is improving call waiting times. The addition of live chat messaging and the 'AskNED' (non-emergency directory) on the Devon and Cornwall Police website offers the public alternative ways to seek advice or make contact with the police. The website is seeing increasing numbers of hits. The community messaging system 'Devon and Cornwall Alert' continues to connect people to crime and community issues that are of interest to them.

2.6 Connectivity and engagement with communities across Devon continues to be a strong focus for Neighbourhood Teams and the wider force, including work with faith groups, PRIDE and Exeter Respect festivals, and local reference groups. Extensive efforts have been put into developing positive relationships with Extinction Rebellion and climate change groups.

Volunteers

2.7 Special Constables make a significant contribution to local policing, providing 11,000 hours of volunteer service in South Devon and Torbay alone. Volunteers undertake a number of other roles including vehicle checking, volunteer driving and social media engagement. Volunteer cadets provide a unique opportunity for young people to develop confidence and a range of skills, as well

as providing support for community projects and events. Good working relationships with volunteers from other organisations such as street pastors and chaplains are highly valued.

2.8 Community Speedwatch has recently been reviewed and a series of actions agreed to improve the way it is working, including moving the scheme online (online training, online management information etc). Changes aim to make the scheme more community led, making it easier for communities to set up a Community Speedwatch scheme, as well as addressing the backlog of applications and training needs.

Working in partnership

2.9 Joint working across partner authorities and organisations is an essential part of delivering safer communities and Devon and Cornwall Police continue to take a significant leadership role in this respect, with both the Safer Devon Partnership and the Devon Children and Families Partnership being chaired by senior police colleagues. These partnerships play a significant role in addressing areas such as County Lines activity, preventing domestic and sexual violence and abuse and early intervention around young people and criminal activity.

2.10 Devon and Cornwall Police have a continued focus on prevention and early intervention, using trauma informed approaches to inform this way of working with partners. Examples include Operation Encompass where the police work with schools to alert them when there have been incidents of domestic violence in the home, working with Devon Partnership Trust to provide mental health assessment and support for vulnerable people who come into contact with the Police, and the Pathfinder scheme which provides an alternative approach to conviction for first time offenders of low-level offences, which includes drug or alcohol rehabilitation, community service and restorative justice.

3. Conclusion

3.1 As with all public sector organisations facing reduced funding and increased demand, Devon and Cornwall Police have had to look carefully at how they can continue to fulfil their core purpose within such a challenging environment. The changing nature of crime brings additional complexities, with criminal activity increasingly taking place online and the developments of strategic threats such as dangerous drug networks and exploitation.

3.2 Although Members continue to have some concerns about the longer-term impacts of the reduction in PCSOs across Devon, we are reassured to some extent that new roles and initiatives have been introduced in local policing, and we particularly welcome the creation of a Rural Crime Team and collaborative frontline roles with Devon & Somerset Fire & Rescue Service.

3.3 The relationship and trust between the Police and the people they serve remains as important today as ever, and we know that how safe people feel in their homes and communities has a real impact on people's wellbeing and happiness. It is pleasing to see that positive changes are being made to the contact centre and the availability of online information, and we look forward to seeing improvements in the experiences of the public in this area. Equally, giving communities a greater leadership role in the Community Speedwatch scheme is a move that will be warmly welcomed by local councillors across Devon.

3.4 Finally, we would like to thank Devon and Cornwall Police for their collaboration throughout the 2017 Spotlight Review, and for their continued dialogue with the CIRS Scrutiny Committee on the topic of local policing to date. Particular thanks goes to Chief Superintendent Sam De Reya and Chief Superintendent Keith Perkin for their presentation and discussion with Members on 8th November 2019, and to Lisa Vango from the Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner for her attendance and contribution.

4. Membership

Councillors Alistair Dewhurst (Chair), Yvonne Atkinson, Su Aves, Polly Colthorpe and Debo Sellis

5. Contact

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6. References

Devon and Cornwall Police and Crime Commissioner, Annual Report 2018/19

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Devon County Council, Corporate Infrastructure & Regulatory Services Scrutiny Committee, Impact of Changes to Local Policing Spotlight Review, November 2017

<https://democracy.devon.gov.uk/ecSDDisplay.aspx?NAME=Impact%20of%20Changes%20to%20Local%20Policing%20Spotlight%20Revi&ID=678&RPID=2985852>

Devon County Council, Minutes of the Corporate Infrastructure & Regulatory Services Scrutiny Committee, 12th June 2018

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