

OFFICE OF THE POLICE AND CRIME COMMISSIONER FOR GWENT
STRATEGY AND PERFORMANCE BOARD
23rd NOVEMBER 2022

Present: **Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner (OPCC)**
Mr J Cuthbert - Police and Crime Commissioner (PCC)
Ms E Thomas – Deputy Police and Crime Commissioner (DPCC)
Mr D Garwood-Pask – Chief Finance Officer (CFO)
Mrs S Curley – Chief Executive (CEX)
Mr S Slater – Head of Strategy (HoS)
Mrs J Regan – Head of Assurance and Compliance (HoAC)
Mrs N Warren – Governance Officer (GO)
Miss B Hale – Standards and Governance Officer (S&GO)

Office of the Chief Constable (OCC)

Ms P Kelly – Chief Constable (CC)
Ms R Williams – Deputy Chief Constable (DCC)
Mr N Stephens – Assistant Chief Officer, Resources (ACOR)
Mr N McLain – Assistant Chief Constable/Head of Continuous Improvement (HoCI)
Mr S Payne – Head of Professional Standards Department (HoPSD)
Mr M Coe – Head of Finance (HoF)
Mr M Edwards – Staff Officer (SO)
Mrs N Brennan – Assistant Director/Head of Joint Legal Services (HoJLS)

The meeting commenced at 10:00am at the new Police Headquarters and online via Teams.

The PCC welcomed Rachel Williams, the new DCC and Beth Hale, the new Standards and Governance Officer to the meeting.

The PCC thanked the Chief Officers for the recent award ceremony which showcased true policing in Gwent.

The PCC informed us we would be focussing on the core reporting areas during the meeting. Items 3b 'Professional Standards Department (PSD) Performance Report Quarter 2, 2022-23, and 3f 'Compliance with the Code of Ethics', were to be taken together, 3a 'The Organisational Performance Report against the Police and Crime Plan Priorities, Quarter 2 2022-23' was to be taken next followed by the CC's Budget Bid. The remainder of the planned agenda items would be scrutinised in a timely manner at the earliest opportunity.

PCC advised us that he had taken the decision to amend the agenda in order to focus on matters of trust and confidence in policing following an article in the Sunday Times uncovering appalling messages sent between former and serving officers of Gwent Police via a WhatsApp group. This was to give the CC the opportunity to explain what

actions had been taken and what was to be done to respond to the issues raised, with the exception of restricted information.

1. <u>APOLOGIES</u>	Action
<p>Apologies for absence were received from J Everson and L Davies, Unison, C Williams, Ch/Superintendent East Local Policing Area and E Lionel, Principal Finance & Commissioning Manager.</p>	
2. <u>PROFESSIONAL STANDARDS DEPARTMENT PERFORMANCE REPORT QUARTER 2, 2022-23, AND COMPLIANCE WITH THE CODE OF ETHICS REPORT.</u>	
<p>We received and noted the Professional Standards Performance Report Quarter 2, 2022-23 and the Compliance with the Code of Ethics Report.</p> <p>The PCC emphasised that he had full confidence in the CC to take appropriate action to deal with the issues following completion of the investigation. The PCC advised us that he and the and CC had engaged with local Members of Parliament and Members of the Senedd on the matter and this would continue. We were assured that Gwent Police would continue to fully support Wiltshire Police with their investigation to ensure appropriate action could be taken where necessary. A statement had also been made in response to a news interview with the family members of the retired officer.</p> <p>The PCC acknowledged that some information was restricted in respect of the investigation and asked if the CC and DCC could provide some explanation as to what actions had been or were to be taken where possible.</p> <p>The CC thanked the PCC, the majority of political representatives, key stakeholders including those within the Senedd and the UK Government for their support for herself and her officers. The CC explained that she was keen for the Force to be open and honest about the investigation and the actions to be taken from the earliest opportunity in relation to the issues raised in the Sunday Times article, in order to ensure public confidence.</p> <p>The CC referred to the content within the WhatsApp group messages as being absolutely unacceptable and she was not prepared to accept this conduct within the Force. Since her appointment three and a half years ago, the work undertaken in relation to culture had highlighted this including; the previous DCC leading on the Violence Against Women And Girls (VAWG) agenda for Wales, the CC leading the All Wales Anti-Racist Criminal Justice Action Plan and the National Police Chief Council's (NPCC) Anti-Racism plan. There had been a number of work programmes across the Force to raise awareness of expected standards and advice and support had been offered in terms of encouraging officers and staff to report issues, should they become aware of anything of concern. There was also a Safecall line available to report such issues anonymously. The CC also</p>	

advised us that PSD would provide a clear document for dissemination across the Force to re-iterate cultural expectations and to provide clear reporting lines for staff and officers to contact.

Action

The CC informed us that she was also Chair of a Culture Board where cultural expectations were clearly set out including ensuring that every new employee within the organisation was spoken to by the CC when first appointed about their expected standards of behaviour.

The CC reiterated her distain for the abhorrent comments contained on Mr Ricky Jones' phone, an ex-police officer who retired in 2017 and committed suicide in 2020. Mr Jones' family provided data contained on Mr Jones' phone to the Sunday Times and as a result an investigation was launched. She confirmed that Gwent Police would fully support Wiltshire Police and the Independent Office of Police Conduct (IOPC) with their investigation within the statutory boundaries, to identify any officers involved in the messaging at pace in order to ensure robust action could be taken, particularly in relation to serving officers.

More generally, the CC informed us that even though good progress had been made in the area of public confidence, the Force were working to clear a Public Confidence Strategy and Communication Strategy to demonstrate their work to the public, to utilise voices within the community and within the organisation to highlight the cultural changes that had taken place. Key stakeholders would continue to be updated appropriately throughout the investigation.

It was noted that many of the issues raised took place prior to the appointment of the CC. However, the CC emphasised the importance of continuing to drive cultural changes going forward to ensure good morale within the Force.

Although some elements of the investigation were restricted, the DCC was able to assure us the Force were managing the issue. An internal Force Gold Group meeting was being held with the strategic intentions of maintaining the trust and confidence of our communities, the workforce, procuring and preserving evidence to support an effective investigation, maintaining welfare and wellbeing of employees and mitigating current or emerging organisational issues or risks that may affect our communities. The structure of the review would include all of the allegations made, including complaints made to the Force directly and also the issues raised within the media relating to retired officers. We were informed that the policies and procedures to deal with such issues were very different regarding serving employees compared to those who had retired. However, the DCC assured us we would be kept informed of the powers and procedures available to deal with the issues and the approach taken in conjunction with the IOPC and Wiltshire Police investigations.

The DCC echoed the comments of the CC in that the comments were abhorrent and ghastly and acknowledged that they had affected public trust

and confidence, which was why the strategic intentions had been developed with the premise of being as open and honest as possible when providing updates within the public domain, whilst remaining within the limitations of investigative restrictions. Wiltshire police were investigating the previously known issues independently. Gwent Police had acted swiftly with three referrals to the IOPC being made within 5 days of them being made aware of the data content and this pace would continue. The Gold Group was comprised of key members including the Chief Executive, a representative from the Independent Advisory Group (IAG), the IOPC and Wiltshire Police. This group would be continuing and internal and public updates would also continue, however, timescales on the updates would be dependent other factors.

Action

Although a significant amount of work had been conducted within the Force in terms of reviewing professional standards and culture, the DCC advised us that even greater focus would be placed on ensuring this was built upon in the long term. Professional standards performance would be a key focus for the Force to ensure public trust and confidence within the Force. This would involve listening, engaging and looking at innovative methods to connect and manage relationships with our communities.

The PCC requested reassurance that the family of Mr Jones was receiving appropriate support and contact through the relevant parties. The DCC confirmed that she had made that request of both Wiltshire Police and the IOPC.

The PCC referred to the recent briefing provided by the PCC and CC to Members of Parliament and Members of the Senedd and the comment made with regards to retired officers influencing serving officers in a derogatory way and asked if there was anything that could be done in practical terms to mitigate this if it were to be the case. The DCC informed us that although there were difficulties in the amount of information she was in a position to disclose, we were assured that as lead of the Gold Group, whilst maintaining integrity in terms of decision making, she was aware that it was imperative that the investigation moved at pace and would provide updates when able to do so, to key stakeholders.

The PCC referred to the measures to be taken by the CC and DCC and asked if Gwent Police were confident with their plan to improve culture within the Force and if it was well understood and would achieve that objective. The CC advised us that culture would form part of the current HMICFRS (His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire and Rescue Services) Police Effectiveness, Efficiency and Legitimacy (PEEL) Inspection, which would provide an independent view of culture within the Force. The CC explained that all employees were aware of her expectations given the level of focus that the Force had put on their expected standards of behaviour, so employees who breached those standards would be dealt with robustly. Although, it was important to note that the majority of employees within the organisation were upset by the issues in the media. The primary focus going forward was to ensure that these cultural changes were adhered to on an

ongoing basis. Therefore, in addition to the aforementioned measures, the number of staff culture surveys would be increased, the Safecall number would be disseminated again across the Force on a regular basis to ensure employees were aware of how to report issues with confidence, including issues on social media. This would be done at pace and reported through the relevant Governance Boards and to the SPB. In addition, the reaffirmation of the oath to King Charles III would be an important and timely one for all officers as this would encompass those cultural conversations.

Action

The CC advised that whilst the Force were dealing with the issues raised within the Sunday Times, it was important to note that other misconduct cases were being dealt with as a result of PSD's proactivity, to ensure expected standards were being upheld and to continue to improve culture further by flushing out those who do not adhere to Force values. It would be important to communicate this.

The CC advised us that there would be a continuation of the Public Satisfaction surveys to monitor public confidence and emphasised the importance of obtaining feedback in terms of policing within the community from the IAG and other key stakeholders. The IAG had provided valuable feedback following the news reports in the media, which appeared to a positive balanced view within the community. The PCC welcomed their views and suggested this was an area that could be explored by his office.

CC

The PCC asked if there were any issues that vetting could improve and if the whistleblowing policy could be improved, particularly to encourage newer officers to raise concerns with confidence. The CC assured us that the Force were compliant with the national standards. The Force had invested heavily in resourcing the vetting department. The number of employees who had not been re-vetted was in single figures, which was due to those employees being on long term sick. There were 43 recommendations within the recent HMICFRS thematic report which was focussed on vetting, misconduct and misogyny. Of those 43 recommendations, there were 5 areas for improvement, 17 which were directly linked to vetting. The review of South Wales Police had resulted in a 'good' rating to which many of Gwent Police's policies were aligned. The CC had tasked the HoPSD and his team to undertake a self-assessment against the recommendations and the areas for improvement. The results would be reported to the OPCC and the Police and Crime Panel (P&CP) at the earliest opportunity.

**CC/
HoPSD**

The HoPSD advised us that the Vetting Manager was in the process of benchmarking the recommendations and early indications were that the Force were in good position. Discussions were being held on a national level in relation to new Authorised Professional Practice (APP) for Vetting Standards and resourcing requirements. We noted that HMICFRS were to inspect PSD on the 12th December 2022 on vetting and counter corruption; this would also provide valuable information in terms of benchmarking.

We were informed that Vetting had become considerably more complex, particularly with the impact of the social media footprint. The Force were a

positive outlier with regards to conducting vetting interviews, should there be any concerns. There was also a vetting appeals panel in place to ensure clear decision making with regards to appeal outcomes. The OPCC Head of Assurance and Compliance is a member of the panel.

Action

The CEx asked how the moral compass of new recruits was tested as vetting only reviewed the history of recruits. The HoPSD informed us that psychometric testing was being considered on a national basis and it was expected to be piloted within the next six months.

The PCC referred to a briefing provided to Members of Parliament and Assembly members on the recent media issues, where a comment was made in relation to retired officers influencing serving police officers and asked if anything could be done in practical terms to mitigate this. The DCC explained that consideration was being given to approaching organisations representing retired police officers in order to ascertain if there was anything that could be done to ensure Force values were being followed and that retired officers were being made aware of changes in standards. However, it was acknowledged that once an officer had left the organisation, there was no legal option to follow, therefore, it would be more of a request to retired officers.

The CC advised us that she has spoken to the Heads of Department and Chief Officers regarding her concerns about any relationships with retired officers and clarified that any conversation regarding operational policing work could be deemed as a data breach and this message was disseminated across the Force. This would be checked and tested.

The DPCC suggested that the infrastructure for internal or external victims could be enhanced and asked if any areas of support had been considered for improvement. The DCC confirmed that victim support was one of the areas for consideration with the medium to long term plans with PSD in terms of increasing public confidence and trust within the Force. The DCC had reiterated her expectations in a recent internal Force Video Briefing (Vlog) with regards to utilising the existing framework to support victims and explained that further work was being undertaken to maximise support mechanisms and commissioned services.

The DCC assured us that the Force would not be deterred from taking action due to negative reports in the media. The IAG were keen for the Force to continue being proactive as this would encourage increased reporting, rather than stepping back to try to mitigate issues raised in the media. The Force intend to do the right thing, however difficult the circumstances in terms of services and care for victims.

The HoPSD explained that a business case was to be submitted to the Service Improvement Board (SIB) in order to formalise a temporary role into a permanent role. The new role within PSD, would be specifically looking at care and contact of witnesses in police misconduct matters, should it be approved at SIB. The officer would be utilised to signpost witnesses to the

relevant commissioned support services, many of which were already established in relation to domestic abuse or sexual misconduct. Two witnesses involved in a recent high profile police conduct case had bravely offered to assist with the development of the new role, to which the HoPSD was very grateful.

Action

The DPCC suggested that PSD may wish to consider independent advocacy services in relation to enhancing support services and also to provide support for people to report issues if they were reluctant to contact the police directly. The DPCC offered her assistance to the HoPSD and R Allen, (Criminal Justice for Wales) to discuss the matter further and the DCC agreed.

**HoPSD/
DPCC**

The PCC requested clarification of the figures in the table on page 4 of the report and for narrative to be added in order to provide an explanation. The HoPSD explained the table showed the total number of complaints recorded in each quarter and of those finalised in that period. The HoPSD agreed to add a cumulative column alongside the others.

HoPSD

The HoAC asked if PSD monitored officers that were subject of repeat complaints and the HoPSD confirmed this formed part of their current processes to identify potential issues.

We noted the acronym SPLY in the report and asked that it be expanded within future reports. The HoPSD confirmed it referred to the 'same period last year' and agreed to ensure acronyms were clarified.

The PCC referred to the number of death or serious injuries noted within the report and queried if the numbers were correct as the figures appeared to be high, with 29 live investigations and 16 IOPC referrals in quarter two. The HoPSD confirmed the figures were correct as there were a number of factors involved. Although there had to be a mandatory referral to the IOPC for a death or serious injury that did not mean there were conduct matters for the officers involved. There was a number of thematic issues resulting from that relating to the control room, including officers attendance at non-attendance Welsh Ambulance Service calls. The PCC asked if narrative could be provided to explain the figures in future.

The HoPSD explained that PSD had been providing as much detail as they could with regards to timeliness and comparisons of their own performance. However, the IOPC national performance data would assist going forward as it would enable the Force to benchmark their performance against other Forces. The CEx asked that the HoPSD worked with the HoS to determine what performance data should be included in the report as the data provided by the IOPC wouldn't necessarily be what the P&CP or members of the public would find most useful.

**HoPSD/
HoS**

The CC raised concerns regarding the timeliness of complaint investigations by the IOPC and requested support of the PCC in raising the matter with them, as it undermined public confidence in policing, and also cost the public

<p>taxpayer, due to officers being suspended for the duration of lengthy investigations. The PCC agreed.</p>	<p>Action</p>
<p><u>3. THE ORGANISATIONAL PERFORMANCE REPORT AGAINST THE POLICE AND CRIME PLAN PRIORITIES, QUARTER 2 2022-23</u></p>	
<p>We received the organisational performance report against the Police and Crime Plan (the Plan) Priorities for quarter two 2022-23.</p> <p>The ACC presented the report and provided the following additional information. The Force had based their annual comparison to 2019-20 (pre-covid) as the last two years had been an anomaly in comparison to previous years.</p> <p>The latest quarterly Crime Data Integrity (CDI) audit had achieved a 91% rating which was consistent with the last two quarterly audits at 91% and 92%. This was a positive improvement when compared to 75-80% in 2019/2020, as it equated to 12% more crime being recorded. Although crime was being reported previously, it was not being fully captured and recorded due to issues with CDI.</p> <p>There had been an increase in general crime during the quarter of 5%, however, this was not unexpected as there was usually a slight increase in quarter two due to longer days and hotter weather conditions.</p> <p>Positive outcome rates had increased by 2.6% to 9.4% for this quarter. Although the Force were slightly lower than other Forces in this area, the Force have been focussing on improving positive outcomes and further improvement was expected by the next quarterly report.</p> <p>The number of residential burglaries had increased in the last quarter by 6.5%. However, this was not dissimilar to other Forces and it conformed with the trend seen during this period in the past two financial years. Although crime levels had remained lower than the pre-covid year 2019/20 in Gwent due to the We Don't Buy Crime (WDBC) initiative and the problem solving work undertaken. Positive outcome rates remain a challenge nationally and locally in this area. The Burglary Improvement Plan pilot had been launched to encourage further focus on crime scene investigation, swifter arrests due to improved forensic packages, golden hour enquiries and lean investigations. This was being monitored through the Force Performance meeting and increased positive outcome ratings were expected by the next quarter. The HoS asked whether the force were in compliance with the commitment to attend all burglaries. The ACC assured us that the Force had always attended the vast majority of burglaries as a matter of course.</p> <p>Neighbourhood crime including robbery, burglary and theft had seen a seasonal increase of 2.2% compared to the previous quarter. Gwent sat at 20th out of 43 Forces. However, this was 26.1% lower than the same quarter</p>	

pre-covid 2019/2020. The Force were 9th out of 43 Forces for solved rates in this area, it was acknowledged there was work to do to improve this.

Action

Public order incidents had increased by 11.8%, which was likely to be due to improved recording of these types of incidents. Public order solved rates stood at 7.5%, an increase of two percentage points when compared to the previous quarter.

The PCC asked what work was being done to improve the use of community resolutions. The ACC informed us that 2.5% of outcomes were related to community resolutions. The Force registrar was in the process of reviewing the Home Office (HO) counting rules and the NPCC national guidance for clarification, as there appeared to be some contradiction between them. Once this had been determined, the outcome should be applied more swiftly and more officers would take the opportunity to utilise the community resolution outcome process, this should also see a reduction in the level of public order incidents.

Officers were now able to submit traffic offences remotely from their digital devices, eliminating the need for hard copy documents, minimising delays. This assists the Force in securing convictions and reducing Road Traffic Collisions (RTC), the most common being drink/drug driving offences.

The Force had seen a significant increase of 16.6% in serious violence offences since the pre-covid year. A newly established Serious Violence Crime Strategy and Serious Violent Crime Delivery Plan had been established to tackle the issue. There had been a decrease over the last month or so. Work was also being conducted with local partners to reduce serious violence offences. The Force were 21st out of 43 Forces for their solved rates in this area.

There was a disproportionate effect of domestic abuse on women and girls and an increase in the levels of stalking and harassment. Stalking and harassment offences have traditionally been troublesome for Forces to identify and record as there was a different crime recording process to follow. The increase in these offences could be seen to be positive in that the Force were recording the offences more accurately. The PCC referred to a recent news report in that stalking and harassment offence reports were decreasing across Wales and asked what the cause of the reduction could be. The ACC informed us that a domestic incident may also include a stalking and harassment offence. As Gwent Police recorded incidents centrally, research could be undertaken to ascertain if there was more than one offence linked to an investigation. Therefore, they had a good level of incidents recorded. Although it was the only crime type that was recorded twice, so it could be difficult to record. This was a nationwide issue.

The level of drug trafficking and supply offences had decreased by 7.9% in quarter two. There had been a number of successful operations conducted, including Operation Bothwell, resulting in significant drugs seizures of 11 kilos of cocaine with a street value of £60k. There was a drug focussed desk

based within Newport custody unit to assist with this type of complex prosecution.

Action

The Financial Investigation Unit (FIU) were 4th in the country for their good work on asset recovery. During the past quarter they issued confiscation orders amounting to £67k in addition to £147k detention orders.

Hate crime incidents had decreased from quarter four 2021/22 to this quarter, however, hate crime had increased by 22.3% when compared to quarter 2 in 2019/20. The Force had been conducting work in this area, including the Race Action Plan, IAG, the Community Inclusion Team and feedback had been positive from the community groups. Positive outcome rates were improving in this area.

Rape incidents had reduced by 13.4% in this quarter, although there had been an upward trend in positive outcomes to 5.2% this quarter. Overall, the number of rape offences had increased by 4.7% compared to quarter 2 pre-covid 2019/20. However, this could be attributed to increased confidence in reporting, due to the Force encouraging reporting, which was a key focus within the Government's Beating Crime Plan. The Force were ranked 23rd out of 43 in this area of work and therefore acknowledge there was further improvement required.

The PCC asked if there were any indications of how Operation Soteria was progressing and the benefits it may bring, whilst being mindful it was in its infancy. The ACC informed us having experts based in this area had already seen improvements, particularly in the quality of investigations.

Domestic related high risk cases were being well managed through the CDI review process. Positive outcomes for domestic related crime had risen by 1.8 percentage points to 10.5%. There had also been an increase in the use of domestic violence protection notices, not only those applied for but those that had succeeded with the required outcome.

The increase of repeat victims since 2019/20 stood at 27.2% which could be attributed to confidence in reporting, increased scrutiny and recording crime more accurately.

Modern Day Slavery and Human Trafficking (MDSHT) offence levels had been maintained and there had been a reduction in the number of Child Sexual Exploitation incidents recorded.

The Force referred 14,294 victims to their Victim Care Unit for support during the last quarter, with 10% of victims requiring additional support. The Witness Care unit also provide guidance and support victims through the court process through to prosecution. The Survivor Engagement Coordinator continues to engage with survivors of sexual and domestic offences in order to gather feedback on their experience of reporting to enable learning and changes to be made in Force.

Perception surveys have been conducted to gauge public confidence in policing and overall victim satisfaction was good with 73% agreeing that they had confidence in the police in their area, the lowest levels being in Newport and the highest in Monmouthshire. However, it was acknowledged there was more work to do to increase confidence in the Black, Asian and Ethnic Minority Communities, and plans had been implemented to combat this issue, including the Race Action Plan. The PCC agreed that it was imperative that focus should be on community cohesion and improving public confidence given that only 49% of ethnic minority groups were confident in their policing area. The CFO asked if data on gender formed part of the survey as historically public confidence in females was higher than men. The ACC confirmed that the Head of Strategy had had sight of the full perception survey report for scrutiny but it had not been included in the summarised version of the report. The CC confirmed public satisfaction had been retained following the tragic Sarah Everard case.

Action

Over 83% of Victims agreed in the Victim Satisfaction Survey that they were being kept informed about their case.

There were currently 3.4% officers from an ethnic minority background in Force which was higher than the national average. The Force were on target with regards to recruiting the required number of officers in order to meet the UK Government's Operation Uplift programme specification by March 2023.

Demand had risen by 20.4% in relation to 999 calls and 5.1% for 101 calls since the previous quarter. The Force were answering 84% of 999 calls, with an average of 13 seconds, which was just below the at 90% national benchmark at 10 seconds. However, this was in line with most other Forces. The new equipment/software within the Force Control room should assist with dealing with the increases as the new recruits become more experienced within the department. The PCC asked what the causes of the increased levels of calls were. The ACC informed us there had been increased demand nationwide. It was likely to be due to a number of factors; societal changes had taken place as more members of the public were willing to call the police following the covid pandemic, the public also called the Force if other emergency services were unavailable and the Force had become more accessible through the use of other channels. The HoS asked if further information on the totality of demand in relation to 999 and 101 could be provided in future reports.

ACC

The CFO emphasised the importance of ensuring the P&CP were made aware of the correlation between the increased 101 call abandonment rate of 42.5% being a cyclical issue where callers were abandoning the 101 number to call 999 instead, as 999 calls always took priority over 101 calls. This was in addition to the usual 999 demand. The PCC also suggested the Force reviewed how 101 calls made to 999 would be dealt with. The ACC assured us there was data available to track that information.

The PCC referred to recent issues raised in the media regarding cyber crime and fraudulent activity, particularly in relation to Black Friday and asked how

what it required in terms of delivery of the CC's requirements and nothing more.

Action

The total budgetary requirement for policing services for 2023/24 stood at £171.424m reflecting the significant Change Programme as detailed in the report.

The budget was built on a number of assumptions in terms of income with a financial gap of £20.4m with a release of £3.904m of savings leaving a deficit of £16.496m by 2027/28. The bid included a capital requirement of £124.968m; although it was the largest capital requirement the CC had asked of the PCC, it was in line with the Estate Strategy. The deficit could not be met by the additional funding the UK Government were indicating or by the precept. Due to the increasing cost of commodities and services over the last 18 months, there would be a borrowing requirement of £82.999m to 2027/28. Although the current borrowing level was zero, borrowing would fund the capital programme which had become more expensive as a result of the rise in inflationary costs.

Next year there would be an £8.858m funding gap and it was proposed that this would be funded through identified savings of £1.142m through the change programme, a transfer of £7.716m of reserves and an increase in precept of 6.82%. The ACOR explained that discussions were to take place with Senior Officers to determine priorities and to promote areas that could be progressed further in terms of continuous improvement and efficiencies, to release further savings over the course of the following four years. Over £2.7m of budgets had already been removed from service areas during the budget process.

During the course of 2022/23, reviews had been undertaken or were being undertaken across the Force. PSD was currently being reviewed and had been identified as an area of growth due to service demand, which was not dissimilar to other Forces in England and Wales. There had also been increases in capacity requirements identified within the High-tech Crime Unit, Firearms licencing and Rape Investigation. These increases needed to be managed to keep people safe and to meet demand.

There was a very small scope in which to identify savings during the course of the next twelve months.

The planned programme for the financial year 2023/24 articulated in the bid was developed following the review of operational delivery model through both the Force Management Statement and the HMICFRS PEEL Inspection. The Force have had to consider other factors including, the Investigation Hub, Neighbourhood Policing Review, Virtual Response Team and Voice Analytics within the Force Control Room.

The ACOR informed us that the Budget Bid had been based on the Autumn Statement but the Government Grant funding for Public Services had not yet been announced and therefore the budget was built on a number of

assumptions as detailed within the report. These included the sharp rise in inflationary costs; the Operation Uplift programme concluding March 31st 2023; officer numbers would need to be maintained this financial year; a loss of £6m through the change of funding formula; and employer's pension rate and national insurance contributions costing almost 45% of the total gross cost of a police officer and 31% for police staff.

Action

There were £5.864m of cost pressures next year, significantly higher than previous years as indicated within the report, including the additional cost due to loan interest in order to fulfil the capital programme.

It had been assumed that Abergavenny Police Station, the Joint Firearms Range build projects and the decommissioning of the old Headquarters would take place as planned.

Following three years of planning, the new Gwent Police Operating Facility (GPOF) would have reached stage 3 of the design by January 2023. This project would need further discussion as part of the budget setting process.

The ACOR advised that the annual capital funding of £500k for sustainability investment had been reduced to almost half for the next few years, with the assumption that the estate maintenance, replacement of vehicles costs and higher costs from pump priming Force initiatives would be absorbed by the Force.

The Force had established an Efficiency Group to focus on areas where savings could be made going forward. There would be further focus on promoting the work of the Force Business Benefits Officer, particularly in light of the learning from the national productivity review and through the change programme. The Force would continue to streamline the Force Delivery Model, in terms of its structures, estate and fleet. The Force would also review and progress collaboration with other Forces to ensure best value for money.

The ACOR referred to the risks to the Force detailed within the report, including the high cost of borrowing; costs of the National ICT Programme; and the HO Police Apprenticeship funding for Welsh Forces.

The CC thanked all involved for their work on the budget and emphasised the importance of ensuring every penny mattered within the budget, given the current economic climate and the cost of living crisis. Although focus so far had been on change, investment to save and to become more efficient; change programmes would be slowed down this year to maximise the changes already introduced by ensuring efficiencies were at the centre of everything without reducing quality.

The CC had concerns relating to political commitments to both the UK Government's manifesto in terms of maintaining Gwent's share of the additional 20,000 officers as part of Operation Uplift; and retaining PCSO

numbers as stipulated in the Welsh Government's manifesto, as this limited the scope to make savings.

Action

The CC assured us that vacancies would be filled only when required. Other Forces were considering reverse civilianisations. However, this would be considered a last resort for the CC, as the investment to train highly skilled officers only to end up filling staff roles would be considered counterproductive. If followed as a general principle, this would be treading on dangerous ground, particularly given the increasing complex operational demand on policing. It was acknowledged however, that officers on light duties may be able to slot into some staff roles.

The CC informed us even though there was a borrowing requirement to fund the significant capital programme, she had concerns that the Force would only be able to deliver operating policing in the future with infrastructure that was fit for purpose. Maintenance of old infrastructure in totality, could cost a substantial amount, particularly if the Force were to wait for the financial markets to settle. Therefore, her bid included the development of GPOF and if there should be a delay, it should not be for a long period of time.

The CC suggested that the narrative in relation to the level of precept should also be provided in pounds as well as percentages to illustrate to the public and the P&CP, the significant difference in the amount received by the Force, which was much lower in comparison to Local Authorities.

Keeping communities safe was critical and this could only be done with the appropriate resources and although it was a difficult budget bid, it had been drafted with due diligence. While being mindful that there had to be ongoing savings to be as lean an organisation as possible, having the right infrastructure was paramount to ensuring the Force could deliver operationally at this time and in the future.

The PCC informed us that he would consider the Budget Bid on the basis of funding the Force to provide an efficient service to keep people safe, but it had to be justifiable and beneficial to the people of Gwent and affordable. He would strive to find the right balance to ensure the stability of the Force in the long term.

The CFO thanked the ACOR and CC for the fair and transparent bid and acknowledged that the context was appropriate, given the current economic climate and confirmed there were a limited number of levers that could be utilised this year to balance the budget.

The Autumn Statement had been made by the UK Government with a commitment to maintain the Comprehensive Saving Review 2021 (CSR21) investments, however this was with the caveat that funding could be adjusted for policing depending on the directive from the HO.

The CFO assured us that the public precept survey illustrated the percentage in pounds and had done so for the past 3 years. There was a 4

to 1 ratio in terms of cash received when comparing the same percentage precept increase between Gwent Local Authorities and the Force. Members of the public completed Estate Surveys in the summer of this year, which also contained a question on the level of precept they would be willing to pay. There was also a precept consultation being conducted until the second week of January, to seek public opinion on the level they were willing to pay. The options available were an increase of £25, £20 or £15. The bid was for an increase of 6.82% equating to £20.72p. There is approximately a £1.3m differential between each option.

Action

The Medium Term Finance Plan (MTFP) took into consideration core Government grant and precept. The CFO re-iterated the risk in relation to the maintenance of the PCSO grant from the Welsh Government and the effect it could have on the growth plan to 182 PSCOs. Other general flat cash specific grants could be cut or removed such as the School Liaison grant. Dialogue was being undertaken with the HO with regards to the £2m differential funding in relation to delivering the Policing Educational Qualifications Framework (PEQF) in Wales; and also the flat cash pension grant, as the Force budget was currently supporting a £2m growth in pension costs.

The use of the reserves was potentially the only opportunity to balance the budget next year with a £7.7m deficit. Although the CFO had always maintained a budgetary imbalance reserve for balancing the budget if required, it currently stands at £5.9m. With the bid as it stood, given the requested precept level of 6.82% and the request from reserves, there was no specific committed fund to close the funding gap of £1.8m.

The CC asked what revenue had been transferred to reserves this financial year to date. The CFO confirmed the non-recurrent underspend for this year was £2.4m, which would be utilised to fund the capital programme as there was only a recurrent movement of £6.145m from revenue to capital each year to fund short term assets, such as laptop purchases or fleet, to negate the need for borrowing.

The CFO advised us that maximising the reserves to balance the budget would be a very risky strategy, as it would require filling a recurrent funding gap with non-recurrent funding.

The CFO commended the Force on achieving £53m of efficiency savings over the past 10 years and advised us there was a £2m efficiency reserve maintained for Force Initiatives, pump priming and PCC initiatives to improve efficiency further.

The CFO explained there had been £11.7m growth, much of which was non-discretionary expenditure in the budget, including, Operation Uplift costs, pay awards, loan interest costs, energy inflation costs; therefore leaving very little discretionary expenditure to work with.

The CFO commended the ACOR and HoF for their work on reviewing existing budgets, resulting in releasing £2.7m of budget reductions. However, there were associated risks with this approach as the budgets were related to previous investments that had been deferred or removed.

Action

There were opportunities to be considered including timing, as there was potential to defer the capital spend and the high borrowing cost associated with it in 2023/24. There were some non-recurrent costs pressures that could be funded in a different way; some expenditure could be risk managed; and some smaller budgets could be removed with a further focus on efficiency. The CFO explained the bid as it stood, including the use of the contingency reserve to balance the budget would leave a deficit of £1.8m.

The CC asked how the Emergency Services Network (ESN) had been incorporated within the budget. The CFO confirmed the ESN programme has been deferred for a further three years but was not expected to go live until 2029/30 in Wales. Therefore, the ESN reserve could be utilised in order to maintain the Airwave services, with the remainder of the reserve that was set aside for the transition could be utilised now with reliance on borrowing in the future.

The CC asked if there was a clear and proportionate understanding of the potential costs of renovating the older infrastructure versus the cost of the GPOF build. There would be inflationary cost rises in relation to maintenance, as well as a new build and interest rates may not decrease for some time. The CFO agreed with the CC's concerns that it was imperative that the Force did not waste funding on re-modelling older infrastructure, if the money could be put towards a new building, as it could be seen as false economy. However, consideration could be given to deferring the GPOF build for two years and delaying the re-modelling of buildings based on a risk assessed approach. The CC asked if the re-modelling costs were included in the budget and the CFO confirmed there was a version that was based on re-modelling infrastructure as opposed to building GPOF, which meant the borrowing requirement would reduce from £20m to £11m next year.

The CC asked how closely Gwent were working with other Forces, as they too would be having similar funding issues and how did the Force compare. The CFO explained that he correlated the Force's precept with uplifts in all Forces in Wales on an annual basis and also reviewed the level of flexibility his counterparts had in England with regards to the precept. He had received two responses that were not dissimilar to Gwent. The HoF also contacted the Heads of Department for each Local Authority area to ascertain their council tax base and expected precept level.

The CC referred to the capped precept in England and asked if there was a possibility that precept could be capped in Wales based on the current economic climate. The CFO assured us that precept, capping and National Non-Domestic Rates (NNDR) were standing items on the Welsh Policing Finance Resource Group agenda and he was confident the precept was not

<p>being capped, as the decision would have been made known early on. The precept was also not capped for Local Authorities in Wales.</p> <p>The PCC thanked the CC for submitting the bid for his consideration.</p> <p>We noted the Police and Crime Panel meeting to be held on the 16th of December 2022 at which discussions would take place in relation to the CC's budget requirements for 2023/24.</p>	Action
5. <u>ANY OTHER BUSINESS</u>	
There was no other business raised	
6. <u>TO IDENTIFY ANY RISKS ARISING FROM THIS MEETING</u>	
There were no risks identified during the meeting.	
The meeting concluded at 12.36	