



**ethics, transparency  
& audit panel**  
Building public trust in policing and fire and rescue



Draft V01

Item 1

## MINUTES OF THE ETHICS, TRANSPARENCY AND AUDIT PANEL (ETAP) POLICE MEETING

Date: 26 February 2025

Location: Police HQ, Block 7, Conference Room 2

### Present:

ETAP members	Officers
Bob Simpson (BS)	Jon Roy – Deputy Chief Constable (JR)
Bryon Preece (BP)	John Bloomer Director of Finance (JB)
Craig Brown (CB)	Emma Cranidge - Assistant Director of Finance (ECr)
Chris Key (CK) CHAIR	Louise Clayton – Chief Executive (LC)
Emma Christmas (EC)	Heather Lees – SCO Finance Director (HL)
Gurpreet Singh (GS)	Kathryn Grattage - SCO Governance Manager (KG)
Jane King (JK)	Deb Wilne Force Governance, Planning and policy manager (DW)
John Wheatley (JW)	Victoria Downing (VD)
Louisa Harrison (LH)	<b>External Officers in attendance</b>
	Dan Harris - Partner RSM Auditors (DH)
	Paul Grady - Azets Auditors (PG)
	Azola Dudula - Azets Auditors (AD)
<b>SCO - Staffordshire Commissioner's Office</b>	
<b>Force - Staffordshire Police Force</b>	
<b>FARS - Staffordshire Fire and Rescue Services</b>	

One member of the public was in attendance today.

Prior to the meeting today, ETAP members held their pre-meeting 10.00 - 10.30. A closed session was held 10:30 – 10:45 before the session was opened to the Public

- 1. Closed Session not open to the Public**
- 2. Declaration of interests, apologies, minutes and actions.**

Declarations of Interest: None

Apologies: Chief Constable Chris Noble, ETAP Members Chris Gill, Byron Preece, and Hifsa Haroon Iqbal.

Minutes & Actions of the meeting on 4 December 2024

**AGREED** - That the minutes of the meeting held on 4 December 2024, are confirmed as an accurate and true record.

### From 4 December 2024

**ACTION 1** – ETAP to consider a member attending the governance meeting occasionally – this action is ON HOLD, for further discussions with SCO.

### 3. Questions from members of the public

No Questions received for this meeting.

### 4. Update from Deputy Chief Constable -JR

The ETPA meeting is an important meeting for the Force in regards to the transparency of the organisation. The performance as a Force continues to improve, are experiencing significant reductions in demand largely due to the preventative activities. Call handling continues to improve in relation to the time of answering calls and the reduction in abandoned calls. There has been a significant response to Domestic Abuse incidents that were graded as a grade 2, medium risk incident, a change in process and in the management of risk means this has been addressed and the performance against this is now coming in line with grade 2 response performance levels for other areas of crime.

Officers are continuing to arrest more people, there is a 17% increase in arrests over the past year and this corresponds to an increase in positive outcomes. The number of people arrested or brought to justice now exceeds 16% for the year which is 3.5% points up on the previous year. This is matched by significant increases in reported victim satisfaction.

The overarching aim is to reduce the number of people who become victims of crime and year to date all crime in Staffordshire is reduced by 6%. Have seen marked increases in some areas, possession of weapons and drugs which largely reflects police pro-activity in these areas, and an increase in sexual offending, which is in part driven by a greater willingness of people to report, and also by an increase in these crimes. Overall the Force has significantly improved in terms of crime and outcome performance.

This is set against a number of major investigations, particularly homicide investigations and a number of firearms discharges particularly in the Stoke area since the last meeting, also the Force continues to run Operation Eagle View which was in relation to the disorders in Tamworth and Stoke last year. Have now arrested more than 200 people in relation to this, and action continues to identify individuals involved.

There are a number of inspection updates. A UCAS inspection of forensics three months ago, unfortunately resulted in the digital forensics accreditation being suspended for a period of time due to inefficiencies in evidence handling and some procedural issues. UCAS have been back this week and accepted all the recommendations and evidence submissions, they want to look at some steady state performance, and will be coming back for one day in 8 weeks' time, but have confirmed that the Force will retain accreditation in all other areas of forensic examination. Anticipate that in 8 weeks' time should be able to reinstate the forensic performance accreditation.

Have had some further mini audit inspections from the information commissioner's office and IPCO which have resulted in action plans, which are being worked through.

PEEL Inspection is just over 12 months away for the field work session. Anticipate building on the most recent PEEL inspection which recognised Staffordshire as one of the most improved forces in the country.

The next challenge will be in May, have the HMIC Child Protection inspection, it is a two-week inspection and confident that the Force will be able to demonstrate how well it is serving the public.

Good progress has been made regarding how the Force is serving the public but there are challenges ahead, set against a challenging financial situation. Reported previously that the Force has found circa £9million saving target for 2025-26, in the last quarter of the year found approx. £8million of this, but still a significant gap to find which is close to approx. £10million. Welcome the support of the SCO in terms of Precept, and everyone in the Force working to achieve efficiencies. It is a challenging financial picture and had to accelerate the areas of savings for 2025-26. Confident will be able to meet the gap, but single year

settlements are not always helpful as there becomes an expectation of Forces to narrow the gap through precept bases. Staffordshire will continue with the challenge and aim to protect service delivery and jobs, and recognise the need to invest in the future. There has been some additional investment around neighborhood policing but need to work this through.

Continues with an improving picture overall as the end of the financial year approaches, Staffordshire Police is in strong position and delivering improvements when set against a challenging financial picture.

Q: CK It is a challenging environment; do you feel the organisation is pulling together regarding this?

A: JR Yes there is a huge sense of this, it takes time for the organisation to understand the magnitude of the challenge. It is a challenge because we have to protect Police Officer numbers so have to be conscious that this will fall predominantly on Police Staff. Over 80% of the overall spend is on people, so there is a limit to non-staff savings. There is a real sense that people understand and are starting to try to develop solutions, finding that people are embracing the challenge and it feels like the organisation is in this together.

Q: CK do you get the sense that this is across all ranks of the organisation and at all locations?

A: JR There is never going to be a 100% buy in, but there is a sense that people do understand the challenge. Recently held an open session for all staff online and in person, the session was led by the Chief Constable and all the Chief Officer team were present, and able to identify the size and scale of the challenge. Communication has been really positive and that dialogue is happening. There are some concerns, but having the open dialogue gives the confidence that people are engaged, understand and supportive of the process. Have confidence in the leaders of the organisation taking this forward, the Force is working collaboratively internally and with external partners to co-produce solutions.

Q: JW Agree that this is the ideal approach to go forward, the organisation knows the challenges short term, but the problems will be the unforeseen challenges as well.

A: JR Yes, and there have been recent Government announcements over the last 24 hours about being prepared, and this is not going to get any easier for the public sector. Don't have all the answers but need to engage organisation to be involved in building the solutions with this.

Q: CB Talked about the 6% reduction in crime overall and mentioned there was an increase in weapons crime due to proactive policing. Is the 6% reduction across all crimes or are there particular crimes that are contributing to that reduction. ETAP is aware of the concept of predictive policing, are Staffordshire using predictive policing and has this contributed to the reduction?

A: JR 6% is across all crimes, there are variants within this, robbery and vehicle crime have reduced significantly, but there are still challenges particularly in the south of county with raiding parties from outside of the county. The rise in weapons crime corresponds to a rise in stop and search, and more than 30% of searches create a find, police proactivity, problem solving, increased stop and search, and increased officers on the ground leads to finding more things and the Force are quite positive about this. Some areas of crime are still a challenge, the number of house break-ins has fallen significantly, but the overall burglary rate is up because the number of sheds, connected buildings and garages continue to be a challenge. Invest a lot in the knowledge hub, in the intelligence capability and Power BI approach to performance risks and challenges but Staffordshire are not at this stage using the predictive AI tool. The Force is maturing as an organisation and there is an ambition to get to the space, where it is using the AI approach to help predict where we need to invest our resources next. What we are currently doing is almost the tier underneath, which is pushing out the problem-solving approach across the Force, intelligence-based policing rolling out across the Force as we develop the technical capacity to be able to do the AI predictive crime hot spotting, the Force is still doing hot spotting but through the more traditional intelligence led methods.

Q: BS ETAP understand that the PNC system is being replaced shortly, is there a time frame for this?

A: JB The first phase of the new system went live two weeks ago nationally. There is a two-year programme and transition phase, and there will be additional costs in running the two systems, which the Home Office will contribute to.

Q: CK Understand there was a vacancy in head of IT, and big IT challenges with cyber risk hazards, and new systems.

A: JR Delighted to confirm there is a new head of DDAP who started 6 weeks ago, will be a fantastic addition to the team and the capability of the Force, and has confidence that this is a gap that will be closed.

Q: BS Previously had reassurance from the Chief Constable that the IT insurance function was ok, but it was lacking a long-term vision with an IT plan.

A: JB That is a fair assessment, the basics work well and have now started to explore some technology with the customer contact journey, document redaction and facial recognition being brought in for efficiencies, so the Force is now moving with the times and seeing progress.

CK thanked the Deputy Chief Constable for the update and taking questions.

## **5. Internal Auditors – presented by Dan Harris**

### **i. Progress Report**

Four final reports have been issued since the last ETAP meeting. Appendix A, page 8 provides a summary of the programme and have detailed where there have been changes. Appendix B on page 9 details suggested changes since the last meeting, have a further meeting today to finalise these changes later.

Q: BS Just to check that the plan is on time and will be completed?

A: DH Yes, RSM is confident that the plan will be on time and will bring the full opinion to the June ETAP meeting.

### **ii. Workforce Planning**

This has a particular focus on Training and Development, it is an advisory review, and this was agreed at the scoping stage as this was an area of underdevelopment. This can be done under the standards to provide guidance on gaps or improvement areas.

Conclusion shows that the Learning and Development (L&D) team have made good progress in developing an effective training and development framework, established skills matrices, development plans, and reporting lines via a governance framework. However, did identify some areas that needed to improve, one high priority action was for an overarching creation of a learning and organizational development strategy, that has been agreed. There was a requirement to update one of the policies to include the role of the L&D team, that has been accepted and is being worked on. Final action was around expanding functionality and utilising Power BI to enhance the reporting, this action has been accepted.

Q: CB with the learning and organisation development plan, is this to do with people culture and the current challenges?

A: JR Have made some significant changes in the approach to developing people over the last 12-18 months, have a new head of organisational learning and development. The changes link to organisational learning which is developing under ACC Becky Riggs, although recognise that there is further work to be done.

JB: Added that this was a known gap, similar to the IT conversation earlier. The parts underneath work well but it is having that high level that pulls everything together, and this gives the long-term direction.

BS: Chair I think we should take some assurance from this, with people being around 80% of the expenditure and the Forces biggest asset and should take assurance that they are developing and doing the right thing. Think it is a positive report and was timely, giving the Force assurance there are no gaps.

Q: CB Just to be clear was there no L&D strategy in place and there is now due to this piece of work, or was there something in place that needed strengthening, and what does success look like for that strategy? If Audit are looking to get this implemented will they be testing the success on implementation and beyond?

A: JB There was a policy in place but didn't have an overarching strategy that pulls this together. In terms of measuring impact, how does the organisation achieve its overall goals and get back to outstanding? Not

necessarily just measuring the success of implementations here, it is about how we define this and what are the other gaps, how does it fit together the skills gaps and knit it all together? It is about how it supports the organisation to deliver outstanding policing.

Q: CB As a follow-up, once this has been implemented will Internal Audit be revisiting this area?

A: DH Yes, absolutely and in particular as it has a high priority action it will have follow-up coverage in the action plan. Will select a random number of actions that are stated as implemented and the high priority action and potentially the two medium actions will form part of this.

### iii. Vetting

CB welcomed Detective Superintendent Victoria Downing to the meeting for this item on the agenda and thanked her for the attendance at today's meeting.

DH – This is the first time RSM had looked at Vetting, a Partial Assurance Opinion was issued with one high and three medium priority actions agreed.

Assessed several control areas including the appeals process, the reporting of performance, user access restrictions to the vetting database and the process for including transfers from other Forces and re-joiners, and carried out the testing against the College of Policing guidance. Conclusion was that RSM have identified issues with the compliance of the control framework, a number of controls were in place but there were some areas of design of the control that were not working, and improvements and actions have been agreed.

There was no evidence available for 5 of the 20 checks sampled, but all of the requirements checks had been completed. There was a further action around the Counter Terrorism Unit checks and some checks not being undertaken due to resource control. Recommended that this is looked at and if this is to be re-introduced. There was an action around appeals and the timeframes, and the post and clearance listing around the listings from Core-Vet which would help in relation to the vetting. There is an Action Plan and all of the actions have been accepted.

VD Acknowledged the report and the recommendations.

There has been quite a transition through vetting, notable was the transition from moving the operating system into Core-Vets which took place in June 2024. As with any new system it takes time to embed and train staff, but the team are aware and have picked up there are some areas to address.

Of the 20 dip sampled cases from RSM, 5 had some checks missing or the checks were not recorded and this resulted in the recommendations and actions. Of the 5, there is no residual risk to the Force in relation to the work done to bring these cases up to speed. Reassurance on the historical data wash from Government, in terms of pushing all nominals through PND to ensure the information we have is what we know about the individuals.

One case was in relation to a 10-year-old who was resident at the address but hadn't been checked when they should have been. One of the actions resulting from this is where the researchers do checks Core-Vets won't allow them to carry on without all the checks being completed, so this will not happen again. In addition, also had a CPD day within the department on 27 January, all staff were advised of the requirements and Core-Vet compliance. Have embedded an audit facility across the three departments ACU, Vetting and Professional Standards. Managers will dip sample some cases and will review against HMIC criteria to ensure checks in place and compliant. From today the compliance around all of these checks are in order.

The second case was in relation to an applicant previously working for the prison service, where enquiries were not made with HMPS. Across the board there has been a national pushback from the national counter corruption group regarding the information available from prison services, an internal memo was circulated

to state saying intelligence will not be shared with police in terms of vetting. This is being worked through at a national level

Third case was due to CTU checks not being completed on the progress sheet, this was an administration error and the checks had been done but not recorded.

Fourth case was CTU checks not being done but these have since been undertaken and there were no issues found.

The fifth case was in relation to an applicant that had served in three other Forces., the checks had only been done in the previous Force and not for all three Forces. Team has been briefed that this needs to be done across all Forces.

### **Actions**

The one High priority action regarding the missing checks, has now been mitigated. Core-Vet lists the checks that need to be completed, and the cases cannot be finalised without this action. The team have all been briefed on this and there are internal audit checks in place for this now.

The second medium priority action was around CTU checks for RVNPPV 2 clearance. The team has reviewed Core-Vet and the process to relieve the burden on CTU checks. A new process is being trialed, and is due to be rolled out this month, however have had an influx in dynamic demand so delayed this slightly, anticipate this being rolled out by end of April.

Third action was a low priority regarding the need to record when no adverse information is found. Needs to be documented and all vetting team are aware. Checks have shown compliance around this and the action has been discharged.

The Fourth was a Medium Priority action in relation to the appeals tracker. Core-Vet has this function so this is sitting within Core-Vet and this is now contained within the operating system.

The Fifth action was in relation to the vetting list. This is regarding the designated post list which informs the position and the vetting required. This is a large task and are looking for a technological solution through Core-Vet to be able to pull this through. Core-Vet are working through this and the development of vetting updates through APP on the system. Only one Force nationally that don't use Core-Vet so this is sitting with APP and Core-Vet.

Have a significant change at the end of March, the Head of Vetting is leaving, he has been in position for over 20 years. Going through a recruitment process for new Head of Vetting, will need to allow time for a new person to bed in and understand the issues around the HMIC requirements for vetting.

CK – it may be helpful for the panel to have an update once the position has been filled.

Q: CK said that the feedback was comprehensive and asked DH if that was what they had seen and felt as well?

A: DH Feel that the inbuilt listings around Core-Vet is a significant control enhancement, and will mitigate some of the risks identified.

Q: JK In the past regarding vetting, there were constraints in regards to capacity looks like now finding ways of doing things smarter, but are there still staff on fixed term contracts?

A: VD It is still a difficult position with staffing, have leavers and maternity cover so there are positions waiting to be filled. Do have internal issues regarding staffing and the longevity of staff, making sure people want to remain in the department. It is a busy department with high expectations and retention can be difficult at times, we would like to retain the current staff.

Q: JK – would be good to have an update once the Head of Vetting has been replaced.

Q: BS Explained that the Head of Vetting used to attend regularly, and ETAP would like to thank him for his efforts and wish him well in his new role. Some of the concerns were around the staffing levels and delays



in the vetting process, previously been explained to ETAP regarding how vetting's are prioritised. How are you measuring timings and what are the current timings for vetting?

A: VD There are peaks and troughs throughout the year and do have a close relationship with HR, so the team are aware when they are expecting bulk recruitment, but sometimes the numbers and the dates change. Every month there is a Governance and Assurance meeting and the timings of all the cases are discussed, reviewed and scrutinised. Additionally, the Head of Vetting has a Deputy Chief Constable Governance and Assurance meeting where timing is scrutinised. The team have a daily management meeting discussing current numbers and timeliness.

JR added that it is important to say timeliness is important but getting it right is more important and there has been significant improvement for new recruits. The Force is grateful for the audit, it highlighted changes that needed to be made, particularly related to the system and allowed development of the accuracy piece to bring the right people into the organisations. Grateful for VD excellent response to the audit.

Q: BS Previously the Head of Vetting brought forward to ETAP any national issues, hoping that there are no issues with Staffordshire?

A: VD No, none in Staffordshire.

CK Thanked VD for attending, and a very important session to discuss an important issue.

#### **iv. Asset Management**

CK asked members if there are any questions in relation to the other reports then these can be brought through to the Chair.

#### **v. Global Internal Audit Standard**

RSM have issued this client briefing which is important to note in relation to the new Global Audit Standards, which generally came into Force on 1 January 2025, but for the Public Sector this will be from 1 April 2025. Briefing says that RSM are compliant, have carried out a gap analysis against the new standards, made some minor tweaks to documentation, audit manual and output documents, but to reassure that RSM are fully compliant.

#### **vi. Draft Internal Audit Strategy including Annual Audit Plan**

This is the draft plan for 2025-26 and important to introduce, it has been discussed with SCO and Force, to prioritise areas. There are three specific areas that are driven by strategic risk and three reviewing key financial controls along with some follow up reports. There are some areas that were discussed but haven't made the shortlist this time, it is for approval but it is a flexible plan and RSM will be holding regular discussions with SCO and Force, and the plans may be subject to change.

Q: CK This is to SCO and the Force to ask if they are happy that this plan does adequately cover the strategic risks across the organisation?

A: LC confirmed that this has not yet been signed off by SCO and there is a meeting to discuss this with RSM later today.

HL: Confirmed this cannot be signed off today as it has not yet been approved.

JB: This covers a lot of risks, and there are follow-up pieces as well. Chief Constable has a role to sign this off as well, it has been through the internal governance process.

### **6. External Auditors**

#### **Audit Completion Report 2023-24 – Presented by Paul Grady**

This report sets out the conclusion of the audit, will need to be disclaimed for reasons already explained.

The key points to note are on page 10 quality indicators, these are in terms of the relationships, not often get green in every area, but this is the case and it reflects the fact that despite the wider issues in the sector as a whole, the accounts have been prepared on time and whilst it cannot provide positive assurance and opinion there is nothing of significant concern, and management have been responsive and informed in terms of what was in the report. The green reflects this and the engagement with the Force.

Page 13 of the report is the significant risks which were standard, can't provide assurance against most of these due to the disclaimer. Have been able to do the work on the IAS 315, assessing the move of financial data from the old to new system, overarching finding was there was nothing that came out as a red risk. A number of findings were discussed and agreed with management.

Next few pages of the report reviews what work has been looked at this year, and touches on what the year looks like in terms of build back for the Force and SCO.

Every year auditors seek third party confirmation from external financial institutions. Two of the investment accounts held didn't return this information, management are aware of the situation and it is one to watch in future years. This is not a fault of the Force, it is due to this information not being provided by an external party.

Value For Money has been completed, there are historical findings from where the Force was in engage, with the PEEL report 2023.24, but it cannot be said there were no significant weakness, so the significant weakness relates to the historical period when in the engage phase. Reflected in the annual report to close off audit with more detail provided. As this was dealt with after the financial year end then there are no recommendations and no other significant weaknesses, notwithstanding the financial challenges to come. Comfortable with the arrangements in place to assess, monitor, understand and mitigate risk and take action as necessary.

Appendix details the various IT related findings, nothing of significant deficiency, the disclaiming of the audit will take place tomorrow, and will be able to go on the Web ahead of the statutory deadline on Friday. Government will check all Webpages to ensure this has been met.

As soon as the NEO inform that there is no additional work, expert there will be no additional work and expect this to be disclaimed, then Azets will be able to issue the certificate.

In 2024-25 audit planning, shorter truncated period in terms of the various backstop, so will be reviewing what can be done in terms of build back, and the three phases to get a clear opinion going forwards.

Proposed disclaimer of information and letter are also in the pack and it is to note, there are no nonstandard representations from management as not identified issues.

BS stated that both the auditors and the management team should be congratulated on another audit being completed on time and getting green on all relationships is almost unheard of. This is a great change from when BS first started.

JB added that if everything is green then everything is outstanding, cannot ask for anything more from the team. From national work that is done with CIPFA, it is pretty much unheard of, and not sure what additional assurance could be provide to public, and would like to express thanks to PG and the Team.

CK wished to raise that on pages 30-32, there are some one-word responses to risk areas raised by the internal auditors. Going forwards the panel would reasonably ask specific responses being undertaken to the amber risks, in response to risks in the cyber arena.



HL added it would be useful to Panel if audit took all recommendations for the Internal and External Auditors and brought it to every meeting to track the risks and actions. Lots of great things in the report but would be useful to have a source document that can be referred to.

**ACTION 1: Force to compile one tracking document for all risks and actions being taken which can be brought to each ETAP meeting.**

DW confirmed that all the internal audit recommendations are tracked and can pick-up the points around the amber risks and put these in to the same tracker.

JB can take this out of the meeting and regarding the one-word answers take this on board and a tracker will help.

Q: BS Staffordshire has met the deadlines but do the auditors have a feel nationally for how things are going?

A: PG there are a number of organisations that won't meet the deadline for a number of reasons. There were some in 2022-23 who received their opinion in time but did not get it on to the website in time, so this shows they did not meet the deadline, maybe some more of these this year. There may be more disclaimed audits for 2023-24, for a number of reasons including this was the first year of the new PSAA contract.

Q: BS What is the next statutory deadline?

A: PG The next one is 27 February 2026, then it comes forward to January and then November going forwards.

CK wanted to repeat the point made at the FARS Public Meeting, regarding the fees were extraordinary for the size of the organisation and would not expect to see the same level next year, the Panel is aware of the financial challenges and needs value for money, although appreciate there has been a lot of extra year one work.

PG confirmed that the fee is set by PSAA.

CK thanked PG for the report and presentation.

## **7. Precept reports including**

- i. Revenue Budget Report Inc. MTFS & Precept**
- ii. Capital Strategy Report and Capital Programme**
- iii. Reserves Strategy Update**
- iv. Treasury management Strategy**

CK confirmed that the Panel had previously praised the reports and noted that this was all in the public domain.

JB confirmed that all of this had been covered at the Finance Panel meeting previously. However, it was worth noting that the Government policy and funding continues to change at pace.

Staffordshire is in a strong financial position, page 4 table relating to the Government impact on funding shows a £5.9million gap. Significant cash increases in funding coming through, but the pressures are coming from pay awards, national insurance, ringfencing of funding, XL bully pressure, the burdens are in excess of the funding received centrally.

There is an amendment to the papers and this was in relation to a financial settlement, which was received two days before the precept papers were taken to panel. This announcement doubled the amount of ringfenced funding, and the Force is now working through what that means for the neighborhood policing

guarantee. Government have been clear this is year one of a four-year program, and need to be clear that the program will not have an impact from day one. The future budget gaps rise to approx. £21million in 4 years, once you take out the ringfencing, in reality the shortfall will fall predominantly on police staff. There are 70 staff vacancies that will be frozen to balance the books, the Force has an excess of this at present in terms of numbers, but the vacancies may not be in the right place from a long-term sustainability point of view.

The Capital program was covered at Finance Panel, being reducing over the last 4 years less in debt year on year, but that can't be maintained long term. There needs to be some investment around physical estate and refurbishments of stations, the southern area custody is a pinch point for the organisation, has 15 cells, these are more than 80% occupied more than 80% of time and the positioning in the County needs to be considered.

Still waiting confirmation regarding the cost of the disorder over summer, not yet received anything from the Government.

CK At the Police Fire and Crime Panel, the Commissioner raised a point in relation to local funding contribution, 10 years ago it was 30p in the £1 but next year it is 38p in the £1, and the public should be aware of the greater burden upon themselves in funding Staffordshire Policing.

LC added that in relation to the challenge around funding, two to three days ago were informed by Home Office, that Staffordshire would receive an additional £1million next year to deliver the ASB hotspot policing, this shows the level of challenge and welcome the funding but it is a one off in year settlement that was unknown at the time of the papers. This will be worked through with the Force and will be brought back to the Panel.

## **8. Force Governance Report – presented by DW**

Touched largely on a lot of the areas in the report and spoken about the two key inspections due. Announcements have come through in the last few weeks, the dates for the Child Protection Inspection only came in on Monday, and also have the dates for the next PEEL inspection. This time next year will be in the final fieldwork stage towards this with a publication due June 2026. Regarding the Child Protection Inspection, the governance and preparation is in place.

AFI's that are ongoing are detailed in the table, making good progress, HMIC were in two days this week and have been going through these in great detail.

Internal Audit reports are detailed in the appendix at the back of the report, and can see the progress around reports and can see the mechanism that is used to track the actions. Reporting once or twice yearly, archived and taken through governance plans.

There is an additional risk that has been added to the register, around the custody facility and confident that at the next report there will be a couple of items on the register that will have been de-escalated and transferred back to the relevant departments.

CK Thanked DW for the report and the tracking.

HL commented that on the strategic risk register a lot of very important things have been discussed regarding the financial risk but that isn't a specific risk on that register.

DW added that EMB is coming up and one of the conversations has been around what might need to be escalated on to the register, but that it needs to be worked through governance.

## **9. SCO Governance Report and Verbal update on work of SCO – combined and presented by LC**

Governance and Assurance report has been issued, outlining the updates to the recommendations in the AGS, Internal Audit and other assurances. It is noted that there have been capacity issues within the department, especially around the vacancy of director of governance. Took a three-month period to consider the needs of the SCO, given the financial challenges. Interim arrangements were put in place and this period is due to end this week. The recommendations will be taken through the governance structure, as to the permanent solution, cannot provide any further details in relation to this at this time but recognise that this has meant that there have been delays to Internal Audit. Recognise one of audits on the progress reports has been paused, this is around collaboration of shared services and this was following discussion with JB and DG, to consider the need the and scope of the audit.

Regarding the SCO there has been a challenge over the last three months capacity wise, with leavers and absence, it is a really small team of 27 people. Have identified a significant amount of savings that have contributed to the group MTFS programme for next year. This will be one of the priorities, have identified between £600,000 for the next financial year, rising to £800,000 for the year after, this is set against a backdrop of challenging circumstances, around some of the areas that the SCO is currently involved in.

Introducing a performance framework for the office, which will be put into place in the coming months, and will provide an update on this going forwards.

Final point to consider is around Devolution and Local Government Reform, there is a lot of discussion taking place both locally and nationally discussion on what this will mean for local authorities and other organisations across the board including Force, Fire, Health and importantly the impact that will have on the Commissioner's Office. If Devolution goes ahead as Government are expecting it to, in the next couple of years there will be more Strategic Authorities and more Mayoral systems. The role of Mayor replaces the role of the Commissioner. The office is having to resource this at the moment to ensure the office is involved in the right conversations at the right level, both nationally and locally.

Q: CK Agreed this was a major change that is being anticipated in the next 12-24 months. What are the timescales for this area?

A: LC Fast tracked areas such as Essex are in line for a Mayoral System by 2027. 2028 is the probable timing for Staffordshire and would align with the next Commissioner elections.

Q: CK Would that cross geographical borders?

A: LC Stoke City Council have put through a paper outlining a North Staffordshire Unitary, Staffordshire County Council have yet to take a paper through their not yet done this, once this is done it will become clearer. There are a number of options, if this is not just Staffordshire then this causes issues with Force and Fire due to the boundaries. This is in the hands of the Local Authorities, and it is important to be involved in the conversations around this.

JB added that having worked in a unitary authority before, this will be a long process once it commences.

Q: BS Victoria previously provided the AGS draft, is this on your agenda?

A: LC The Draft will be presented to the Finance Panel Meeting in March.

DW added that the Force AGS tracks a little later.

## **10. Deputy Chair's Feedback**

**i. Chair of the Finance Panel – Emma Christmas (EC)**

**ii. Chair of the Ethics and Review Panel – Craig Brown (CB)**

Any questions in relation to this can be fed back in writing to the Panel.

**11. AOB -** The date and time of next meeting is Tuesday 10 June 2025 14:00 – 16:00

**CK thanked everyone for their attendance and the reports and presentations.**