

Commissioner's response to Staffordshire Police Public Performance Report

(incorporating Specified Information Order Statement on National Crime and Policing Measures)

Staffordshire Commissioner Ben Adams' sixth police Public Performance Meeting took place on Wednesday 4 October 2023. This was the fourth public meeting since the publication of the HMICFRS PEEL (Police Effectiveness, Efficiency and Legitimacy) report requiring Staffordshire Police to make improvements to services for the public of Staffordshire. It also provided the opportunity to share the progress made since the last meeting against the Commissioner's and the Chief Constable's vision for policing. The Commissioner is keen that the key measures, revisited each meeting, will demonstrate the progress being made against delivering the service-level ambitions in his Police & Crime Plan, in the Staffordshire Policing Plan as well as the National Crime and Policing Measures (NCPM) in the government's Beating Crime Plan. Where appropriate, these are highlighted as local priorities or those that form the national Digital Crime Performance Pack (DCPP). This formal response to the performance report is designed to satisfy the statutory requirement to comment on Staffordshire's contribution to the national measures and be transparent about current progress against local priorities. The Commissioner is satisfied that, where appropriate, Staffordshire Police have used local data to demonstrate their current position.

Chief Constable Chris Noble introduced the performance pack and summarised the force's current progress against HMICFRS recommendations regarding contact and quality of investigations. Without being complacent, the force has made great strides with improvements in its contact centre, moving rapidly up the police league tables with how quickly 999 calls are answered and an improving service around 101 and digital service. It is not just about speed but also about the quality and identification of those most at risk. Demand can be unpredictable and presents challenges which can be partly dealt with by partnership initiatives such as 'Right Care, Right Person' which is gaining traction in Staffordshire.

The force currently make 1,300 arrests per month and local police investment has seen significant positive outcomes in tackling drugs, violent crime, confidence of vulnerable victims to come forward, feedback from the public around accessibility and communities knowing their officers. A lot of the step change can be put down to being back in the heart of local community and delivering against local priorities.

Inside the police service, despite the fact that policing is under pressure, the force has seen improvements in attendance which are testament to workforce health and wellbeing. There has been an increase in 5,000 days of service over the last 12 months.

The most enduring challenge is to maintain investigative standards, grow and mature the new officers joining the force and tackle the national challenge of skilled investigators in the most critical areas.

With national issues such as the conduct of police officers and staff, the public will want to know what we are doing proactively as well as reactively. Baroness Casey's report was borne out of the enquiries in the Met over very many months but Staffordshire had already recognised similar behaviours and invested in campaigns and in anti-corruption. In Chris Noble's tenure as Chief Constable, he has already dismissed 9 officers, including 3 for sexual misconduct.

Current events, including the tragic death of Mr Price in Stonnall involving a dangerous dog, demonstrate the value of reporting to the police and the force will step up its response along with local authorities and other authorities. This is a live investigation with various people arrested. There has been a 22% increase in reporting of these types of incidents (perhaps as a consequence of Covid) but there is no obvious pattern of dog breed or hotspots, with more from South Staffs and Lichfield rather than Stafford. There is also no seasonal pattern. Most important is the value of information coming from the public and the ability to triage and refer to dog wardens and local authorities. Many are not related to a public place either but perception is that it is a dangerous dog. Staffordshire Police are routinely deployed to all such incidents, with dog handlers attending more dangerous dog reports 24/7. We have reviewed access to secure kennels and relationships with local authorities and are well positioned to deal with incidents as we move forward. Whilst there is legislative action for particular breeds, there is also action that can be taken if a dog is behaving dangerously which could take the form of community orders and council support. The key message is to report this if the public see it.

3. A Local and Responsive Service

3.1. Contact and Response: Emergency and Non-Emergency

Triage continues to assist 101 demand, and 999 performance has remained stable in the last 3 months, despite an increase in the volume of calls compared to the previous 3 months. The Commissioner stated that it was an achievement for the force to hold performance at this level despite increases in all contact. There has also been recognition from HMICFRS of the improvements in the speed of response to the public and quality of risk assessment. The Chief Constable made the commitment to continue to invest in new staff and new technology.

101 answer time is broadly around 5 minutes, although the force acknowledges there are longer outliers. Triage resolves two-thirds of these calls at first point of contact and there are options for a queue-buster call-back service. The Commissioner still receives complaints regarding waiting times for 101 calls to be answered, although reassuringly there are no complaints around the quality of the contact once it occurs and threat harm and risk appear to be identified appropriately. There is an outstanding action from the last public meeting which will be required to be brought to January's meeting regarding understanding 101 abandoned rates and the timeliness of 101 calls post-triage. This remains a priority in regular internal performance meetings with the force to improve customer experience.

3.2. Response: Grade 1 and Grade 2

The new local policing model, moving from 3 response hubs to 10 hubs, went live at the end of June 2022 and has seen local policing teams aligned with PCSOs, Specials and detectives (CID). The force is not yet meeting the response targets it sets itself.

In August 2023 43% of all calls were attended within 2 hours of the call being received, with an average attendance time of 2 hours 56 minutes. It has only been possible to measure this since the new graded response policy was implemented on 4 August 2023, as prior to this Grade 2 incidents included scheduled appointments which impacted on the data.

The changes to the graded response policy now see Grade 2 being utilised only for High-risk THRIVE incidents rather than any incident which required the attendance of an officer and do not include any scheduled appointments. This change allows the force to have a greater focus on threat, harm and risk of these incidents. Understanding Grade 2 attendance is a priority for the Commissioner and will feature in all performance meetings until demonstrable progress can be shown.

3.3. Tackle Anti-Social Behaviour

The Commissioner noted the reported 44% decrease in ASB, which appears more dramatic than the public might be experiencing. The changes in Home Office Crime Recording indicate that crimes which may have been dealt with as ASB are now recorded as harassment, malicious communications and other crimes, although the general trend remains down. The Commissioner also noted it was perhaps too early to comment on the ASB hotspot programme funded by the government and implemented in Staffordshire with extra patrols in specific neighbourhoods. The Commissioner requested an update be brought to the next Public Performance Meeting in January 2024.

3.4. Reduce Neighbourhood Crime (NPCM)

Neighbourhood crime includes burglary residential, personal robbery, theft from and theft of vehicles, vehicle interference and theft from a person. The notable anomaly last quarter was vehicle crime increases, particularly in the south of the county whilst the proactive team for Op Bormus wasn't active. The force has collaborated with neighbouring forces to ensure a joined-up approach and improved sharing of information through Op Bormus. Assistant Chief Constable Stuart Ellison commented that the force has learnt from this proactive action plan and has made the logical progression to embed local policing tasking teams within neighbourhood teams as a fixed resource which can be flexed to be applied to other spikes in other crime types as appropriate.

3.5. Road Safety: Enforcement and Community Speed Watch

Deputy Commissioner Helen Fisher was pleased that road safety is a force priority and asked the Chief Constable where the force was with regard to ANPR in Staffordshire, and if there was a timeline for the Roads Policing Unit to be active 24/7.

The Chief Constable is committed to investing in ANPR, although he is conscious that with increased use of fixed cameras and mobile cameras will come increased staffing requirements to process the additional 'hits' ANPR will inevitably bring. This is a recurring issue about finite resources but, with additional investments secured from the public, the force is confident they will be able to provide the back-office functions to support.

Part of Staffordshire's police uplift investment is going into staffing the Roads Policing Unit and delivering a 24/7 service to the public. The coverage does exist through CMPG already on high-speed roads within the county but the Chief would be really keen to push on further and have a dedicated roads crime team for the whole of Staffordshire. Many of our most harmful criminals are using the road networks within Staffordshire and, supported by ANPR and specialist teams, this is an opportunity to ensure that criminals don't get easy use of our roads. Speeding vehicles, mobile phones and seatbelt offences are still an issue for local people and the impact of volunteer Community Speedwatch teams cannot be underestimated. The Chief Constable extended his thanks to these volunteers.

4. Prevent Harm and Protect People

All reported crime has increased by 10% (8,453) in the last 12 months compared to the previous 12 months, but has increased by 15% (11,740) compared to the baseline 2019/20. Per 1,000 population, Staffordshire ranks 23rd in the 43 forces for total recorded crime to March 2023.

More serious violence, public order, other offences, theft of motor vehicles, vehicle interference, possession of weapons, other violence against the person, less serious violence, personal robbery and other sexual offences have increased in the last 12 months compared to both the previous 12 months and the baseline.

4.1. Reduce Murder and other Homicide (NPCM)

Staffordshire is not an outlier in national Homicide data from the national Digital Crime and Performance Pack, sitting 4th out of 8 most similar forces and 22nd out of 42 forces for rate of homicides in two years per million.

Alcohol, drug misuse and mental health are common factors in murder investigations. Many of these murders are the result of broader social issues and require a long-term holistic approach to breaking the generational cycle of violence.

Staffordshire Police, together with the Commissioner's Office, local authorities, health trusts, education, Probation and the voluntary sector, have established a Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent Violence Reduction Alliance to tackle the root causes of violence. Education and prevention continue to be a key part of the Staffordshire Strategy.

4.2. Reduce Serious Violence (NPCM): inc Domestic Abuse & Violence against Women & Girls

Serious violence* includes Knife and Gun Crime, Personal and Business Robbery, Violence with Injury

Nationally this is measured through hospital admissions of under-25s for assault with a sharp object, and police recorded information of offences involving discharge of a firearm. A local measure for knife crime and gun crime is used at the Public Performance Meeting to show Staffordshire's position and this is used as a benchmark for future progress. Knife crime has decreased by 13.3% (110) in the last 12 months compared to the previous 12 months, and has also increased by 18.6% (112) compared to the national Beating Crime Plan baseline.

Serious Violence (Robbery and Violence with Injury) has seen a 34.7% increase compared to the National Beating Crime Plan baseline and 7.9% when compared with the previous 12 months. A new offence of non-fatal suffocation and strangulation was implemented in June 2022, and has contributed to the increase in more serious violence.

Both Domestic Abuse and Violence Against Women & Girls (VAWG) show an increase compared to the national Beating Crime plan baseline 2019. The Beating Crime Plan VAWG measure shows an increase of 77.3% (11,945) compared to the national Beating Crime Plan baseline 2019. This section of the public performance report demonstrates how seriously the force is now taking these types of offences and how coercive control, stalking via mobile phones and harassment and stronger focus on identifying potential escalations in offender behaviour.

4.3. Disrupt Drugs Supply and County Lines (NPCM)

Staffordshire is no longer a national outlier for recorded drugs crime within the drugs section (per 100,000 population) of the Home Office Digital Crime and Performance Pack (DCPP), compared to the national baseline 2018/19. It had the 14th largest increase in the last 12 months compared to the 2018/19 baseline. With the significant risk of modern slavery, county lines and child exploitation drugs activity remain a priority for pro-active teams within the force and a week of action is currently taking place. An update will be brought to the next Public Performance Meeting.

The Chief Constable was clear about the strong Staffordshire stance against cannabis and cannabis farms, which are not harmless and often act as a precursor to stronger and more harmful drugs. Monkey Dust remains an issue predominantly in the Stoke area. Operation Rivent is the force approach to understanding and mitigating the scale of the impact of Monkey Dust in our area, including the organised criminality of supply, through disruption and enforcement, and also working specifically with partners to support those affected by Monkey Dust use. Ministerial involvement regarding reclassification has led to increased media interest and further working with local partners.

4.4. Tackle Cyber Crime (NCPM)

There has been an increase of 11% in Action Fraud cases reported by Staffordshire residents compared to the national baseline in 2019. There has been a 30% decrease in those referred back to Staffordshire to conduct local investigations against the same baseline. The Chief Constable acknowledged that it is an under-reported area by individuals and businesses and certainly a growth area for the force. Criminal justice positive outcomes are down substantially from the last report (11%) to 6.2% and the vast majority (58%) result in a disposal of 'unable to progress the investigation'. The team have worked to improve the recording of outcomes in the last 18 months which has reduced the outstanding outcomes, so the change in the data could reflect accurately and timely updating of outstanding crimes meaning more no further action outcomes, rather than the work remaining in officers' trays unresolved. The Commissioner hopes to see this outcome rate improve as the outstanding workload improves to a manageable level.

Staffordshire already has a sizeable team of experts to deal with fraud disseminations and investigations of a significant size which not all forces have and means Staffordshire will be in a good position to deal with improved data sharing anticipated from the National Fraud Intelligence Bureau.

5. Support Victims and Witnesses

5.1. Victims' Code of Practice Compliance: The percentage of victims referred to support providers within the 2-day target has met the ambition of 75% and this metric shows sustained improvement. The Crime validation process is integral to the transfer of victim data to the Victim Gateway support service. Deputy Chief Constable Emma Barnett reassured the Commissioner that this process is now robust following implementation of phase 1 of the Crime Bureau and service is set to remain at this level. 84% of victim-based crimes have had a victim contract added in the last 12 months.

5.2. Improve Satisfaction among Victims and Witnesses, with focus on Victims of DA (NCPM)

The force looks at the difference between people's perception of the police before and after contact with the force. A reducing percentage (18%) had a more positive view of the police after contact but in contrast a reducing number of people have a more negative view. The force is working up a holistic Victim & Witness Strategy, which will encompass all contact with victims and provide the basis for masterclasses for all officers to increase focus on the victim journey. The 'kept informed' satisfaction rate has reduced over the last 6 months to 73.8% and is recognised as key to improving satisfaction amongst victims and witnesses. Pursuing reasonable lines of enquiry remains the priority for investigations and the force is committed to keeping victims informed so this metric will be monitored for improvement in future meetings.

5.3. Public Confidence

The initial public confidence survey was conducted in June 2022, prior to the launch of the new operating model, to provide a baseline of how the public felt before the changes were implemented. The results of the third survey have been received and these show an improving public perception of Staffordshire Police compared to June 2022 (before the changes were made). Compared to the survey in January 2023, the results are showing reductions in some areas.

In August 2023, 1,600 telephone surveys were conducted and the results indicated increases in four areas, reductions in five areas, while others remained stable. The local level data is also being used at LPT level, although numbers are small once divided by 10 LPTs so with each survey round the information becomes more statistically significant. Key findings are 94% of people feeling safe in their local area during the day; a 5% increase in whether people feel they could rely on their local police team if they needed them and a 14% increase in people agreeing that Staffordshire Police is responding effectively to emergencies.

The Commissioner is very keen that the public have confidence in how complaints are handled. In general, there is an upward trend in total cases of dissatisfaction. The force has been working to improve performance and underwent a restructure within the Professional Standards Department (PSD), which introduced a front-end triage system consisting of two dedicated customer service officers to provide a real-time service when a complaint comes in and reparation for customers. This has reduced contact times and ensured better signposting of complaints to reduce time spent on finalisation.

There has been an increase of 55% in all conduct matters in the last 12 months. Misconduct cases are currently chaired by a Legally Qualified Chair, and there have been recent proposals that Chief Constables should take the chair albeit supported by LQCs. The Chief Constable is in favour of the change, if the process of removing genuine offenders will be made more effective, and the proof will be the hearings in practice. The approach around standards, expectations and conduct is about prevention and allowing supervisors to manage culture and staff behaviour. The Deputy Chief Constable explained to the Commissioner and the public how the force has reflected the Casey Report against the Staffordshire approach, and intends to make sure that standards and values are embedded across the organisation.

6.0 Reducing Offending and Reoffending

6.1. Outcomes

The criminal justice outcome rate was 12.4% in the last 12 months to March 2023, and is stable compared to the previous 12 months and baseline in 2019/20. The Criminal Justice Outcome rate was 13.8% or 1,159 outcomes in July 2023, which included 809 charges/summons, 99 cautions/conditional cautions, and 245 community resolutions.

Staffordshire ranks 12th in the 43 forces for charge and postal requisition rate to March 2023, and 3rd in its 8 most similar forces at 8.5%.

7. A More Effective Criminal Justice System

7.1. Criminal Justice – Timeliness

The key headline from the national Digital Data Dashboard is that Staffordshire is an outlier in timeliness from recorded offence to police charge for a victim-based crime. The average (median) time to investigate in Staffordshire is above the national average, with an average (median) of 70 days to record a successful outcome for a victim-based crime in the latest quarter (Q1 2023) compared to an average (median) of 40 days nationally in the latest quarter (Q1 2023).

The force is intent on developing clear investigation plans and increasing staff in the Public Protection Unit to boost capacity, with the aim of speeding up investigations. There has been improvement in the last few months, which is mainly down to improving the quality of investigations, increasing supervisory oversight and ensuring every officer gets the support they need to deliver a quality investigation. The additional context around most similar forces and national datasets aids understanding and provides additional reassurance of Staffordshire's current performance and this will continue to be scrutinised until improvement is sustained.

8. Enabling Services: HR & Finance Update

8.1. Operation Uplift, Officer Recruitment

The force met and exceeded the officer Uplift numbers as at March 2023, and further recruitment of 60 officers in the coming financial year will continue with the force and the Police, Fire & Crime Panel. Future budget-setting will take into account the Chief Constable's ambition to increase proactivity in several areas and the Commissioner will have to approach the public for support for precept and council tax. Funding for policing has historically been low in Staffordshire; in 2022/23 it was the 12th lowest funded force per population. Staffordshire has the 4th lowest number of police officers per 1,000 population in the country and is the 2nd lowest in its Most Similar Group (MSG). Support functions overall are the 4th lowest in the MSG based on net revenue expenditure per population. Another factor is that 35% of officers have less than 3 years' service, and experience, skills and specialisms are as important as the numbers. The force now needs to push on further to be outstanding in being proactive and has a clear plan for how to achieve this, which will ultimately be more police officers and more police staff.

The Commissioner noted the helpful conversation which prepares the ground for the upcoming council tax precept consultation and thanked the Chief Officer team for a very useful meeting.