

The Police and Crime Panel - Outside Bodies Report 2016/17

The Police and Crime Panel has a number of functions which aggregate into “holding the Police and Crime Commissioner to account”, but the prime amongst these is the ability to both comment upon, and even refer back to, the Commissioner’s budget and precepting proposals. Because of this, the quarterly meetings in January has greatest focus. As in all other areas of public sector budgets are particularly challenging, and notwithstanding Government commitments to maintain police funding, the “small print” can often leave that commitment open to interpretation.

This was the first year in post of the current Police and Crime Commissioner following his election in May 2016. His first budget and precepting proposals took into account the cap which like for local authorities is applicable on raising the police precept. The maximum was sought and under the circumstances of needing to see the maximum numbers of police in Cumbria, this was accepted by the Panel.

In addition to the standard agenda items regarding budget monitoring and progress against the Police and Crime Plan, there have been some other notable items which have been brought before the Panel this year, and which colleagues might find of interest:

Back in October we received a statement from the Commissioner expressing embarrassment that he had “received a speeding ticket as a result of travelling at 36mph in a 30mph limit in early August”. The formal referral to the Independent Police Complaints Commission resulted in no further action, other than the attendance on a Speed Awareness Course. It is worth sharing the Commissioners’ view that “I am fully aware of the negative impact that speeding can have on peoples’ lives and that makes the disappointment even more hard hitting for me”.

Colleagues will be aware that the case of Poppi Worthington has been of interest and concern within Cumbria over the past few years. At the April meeting there was a statement from the Commissioner to the Panel on the outcome of that inquiry. Those that have been placed into the public domain can be found should colleagues so wish.

The new Commissioner has introduced a Newsletter, which I encourage colleagues to ask to be placed on the distribution list as it gives further insights into the work of the Commissioner.

Moving forward there are two significant areas which will have implications for policing and local government in the forthcoming year. The first relates to funding, and Governments responses to consultations on a “Fair Funding Formula”. In a similar vein to other funding reviews, the sparse nature of the indigenous Cumbrian population, and the seeming lack of recognition of the tourism population and additional costs of providing services in a rural area, may have the effect of a significant cut in the budget of the Cumbria service. Along with other rural places the Commissioner is seeking protection from the savagery of the anticipated cuts.

The second area is the desire of this Commissioner to remove the Cumbria Fire & Rescue Service from the ambit of local government and bring it within his remit. This is a national issue and one which needs a careful watch in the next 12 months.

Cllr Ian Stewart
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