

Review into the role of Police and Crime Commissioners

Response to Key Research Questions

1.1. In my experience as a Borough Councillor, working with the residents in Ribble Valley, the general public do not know who the Police and Crime Commissioner is, or what he does and the turnout at PCC elections is evidence of this.

1.2. In terms of reinforcing and sharpening the accountability of PCCs to the communities they serve, how to raise the profile of the PCC and improve ease of public access to information about their PCC, apart from Facebook and Twitter which is up and running, the PCC should be interviewed at regular intervals on Radio and TV to engage the public and report his/her targets and progress in reducing crime.

Lancashire has a high proportion of older people, many of whom turn out for local elections but do not, or cannot, use social media for various reasons and their only means of communication with the outside world is through TV or radio.

Many older people retired to rural areas where police stations have closed, and they are now isolated and although rural policing is now in place with thermal imaging cameras and a Drone team, regular personal contact with rural communities is imperative to build on the work of the rural crime survey in 2018 in order to raise the profile of the PCC and reassure people of their safety.

The public need to be aware of the PCC annual targets for reducing crime and delivering an efficient and effective police force, so this information should be highlighted regularly in newspapers/social media/campaign leaflets.

2.1. The issue of appointing PCC deputies is difficult as in my experience the public generally think that the money it would cost is better spent on policing. An alternative could be to use an emergency committee from the PCP to make urgent decisions in the absence of the PCC, briefed by PCC staff.

The PCP should have greater powers in order to be more involved in PCC work.

3.1. For the right checks and balances to be in place for the PCC-led accountability, there must be a work plan and regular checking of objectives against targets by the P&C Panel. It is useful to use SMART criteria (specific, measurable, achievable, relevant and time-bound) for objectives for the PCC scrutiny checks and for P&C Panel.

I think it is fair to say that membership of the Panel fluctuates frequently as a result of political changes within each Council and each political grouping and this has led to a reduction in the potential strength and influence of the Panel and interest of its members.

The difficulty of getting members to join a task group is an indication of this. A way forward would be to have a rule that a member should be in post for a minimum term of say 3 years.

3.2. Police & Crime Panels do have the tools to hold PCCs to account with induction training and the LGA Guidance booklet for Police and Crime Panels. Budgeting training is essential.

The powers of the Panel are limited. Veto is limited to the precept (which over recent years has effectively been formulated by Government) and the appointment of the Chief Constable. Members are acutely aware that they are more or less limited to making recommendations. An instance of this was the issue of the Commissioner appointing a deputy which the Panel was unanimously opposed to yet the Commissioner went ahead to make an appointment. There is therefore a case that the powers of a Panel should be increased. To avoid this power being misused for political purposes I would suggest a high majority being essential say 75%.

3.3. There should be a system of recall for PCCs if they are unable to carry out their duties or where there is a significant diminution of public trust due to failure to protect the public.

There is an imbalance between the resources and staff advisors available to the Commissioner compared to the Panel who more or less have to rely on their own knowledge and time availability. This leads to a massive balance in favour of the Commissioner on the question of scrutiny. Most Councils have a Democratic Services team who are skilled in obtaining information and suggesting potential witnesses to assist Cllrs with scrutiny. The Panel should really have a similar dedicated officer support team so as to assist members produce the scrutiny we are expected to deliver. I assume also the Chair of the Panel would welcome additional support in carrying out their responsibilities.

4.1. PCC powers around the removal and appointment of Chief Constables must rely on the setting and implementation of mutual aims and objectives for the benefit of the public and this is clearly set out in Government guidance.

However there does seem to be some ambiguity as to the reasons for which a Chief Constable can be dismissed, except for obvious misconduct such as the Rochdale case with issues of child protection which had followed normal internal police procedures. It would be helpful to have information as to the range of reasons for suspending or dismissing a Chief Constable available to the PCC and PCP.

4.2. The PCP should always be able to scrutinise an appointment or dismissal of a Chief Constable to ensure it is reasonable and fair as per public law.

5.1. The strategic benefits of having a single, elected and accountable leader, who is responsible for a range of public safety functions are:

Joining up the governance of two organisations which support the most vulnerable in society and ensuring the services work better together should provide consistency in strategic planning and policy making, budgeting, spending and speed and quality of service across the board. It is clear that governance will be different in the police and fire service but strategic planning in collective areas of business will achieve a more holistic approach to leadership.

It will be easier for the public in all areas to understand overarching decisions, and easier for them to hold a single body accountable at the ballot box for value for money services which are paid for in their council tax.

5.2. The opportunities of transferring PCC and FRA functions to Mayors are that there will be a consistent approach in governance of all public services, devolved government powers and government funds for combined authorities.

Issues may be around the extent of government funding, local democracy, the public may feel that the Mayor is too far removed from local issues. Some services or areas may not get a fair share of funding.

6.1. Benefits – A more streamlined service with a comparative set of objectives to the police service in terms of budget and performance, cost effectiveness, consistency of accountability and transparency in terms of the public having information about progress and improved service.

Challenges -Persuading the public that they will receive an improved fire service under the PCC with evidence of where improvements can and will be made.

6.2. By setting specific SMART objectives, regular performance reviews and publishing performance levels so the public see whether they are getting value for money.

6.3. By the clear description and separation of functions.

6.4. Governance change could help maximise collaboration between policing and fire if training includes some kind of collaborative elements so that each service understands the features and constraints of the other. Also if the two services are given equal consideration and publicity by the LGA & PCC.

Ensure that Councils and relevant outside bodies are included in decisions about change.

Ensure that the public are kept informed of the changes and differences in the strategic fire functions of the PCC and operational functions of the Fire Service.

6.5. Consistency

