

Safer and Stronger Communities Scrutiny Board

Review of the role, number and allocation of Police Community Support Officers in Leeds

Summary of Key findings

Introduction

1. At the start of the 2013/14 municipal year, the Executive Board Member for Neighbourhoods, Planning and Support Services was invited to share his views on potential areas of work for the Safer and Stronger Communities Scrutiny Board to undertake this year. A suggested area was around community safety financial planning for 2014/15 and working with Safer Leeds in determining where future community safety resources need to be targeted, with particular emphasis around Police Community Support Officer (PCSO) resources.
2. In September 2013, the Scrutiny Board was also notified of a request made by the West Yorkshire Police and Crime Panel to have a coordinated review undertaken by the five West Yorkshire Scrutiny Committees on the role, number and targeting of PCSOs in West Yorkshire.
3. Whilst acknowledging that the specific scope and timeline relating to these coordinated reviews is yet to be finalised, and further to the request made by the Executive Board Member for Neighbourhoods, Planning and Support Services, the Board agreed at its meeting on 11th November 2013 that it would commence work immediately to review the role, number and allocation of PCSOs in Leeds that may have implications during the 2014/15 financial year. The outcome from this piece of work would then feed into the wider review requested by the Police and Crime Panel.
4. The Board agreed to undertake this review via working group meetings to which all Board Members would be invited to attend. An initial working group meeting was held on 26th November 2013. At this meeting, the working group discussed proposals aimed at achieving a £150,000 (9.9%) budgetary saving in relation to the Council's Service Level Agreement with the Office of the West Yorkshire Police and Crime Commissioner for the provision of PCSOs across the city. This meeting was attended by the Executive Board Member for Neighbourhoods, Planning and Support Services; the Director of Environment and Housing; the Chief Officer Environmental Action; and Chief Inspector Melanie Jones from West Yorkshire Police.

5. A further working group meeting was arranged to provide an opportunity to discuss the proposals with the Leeds Divisional Commander, Chief Superintendent Paul Money. This meeting took place on 19th December 2013 and an invitation was also extended to the Council's representatives on the West Yorkshire Police and Crime Panel.
6. A final working group meeting was held on 22nd January 2014 to discuss the potential response of the Scrutiny Board to the Executive Board in conclusion to this review. This meeting was attended by the Director of Environment and Housing, the Executive Board Member for Neighbourhoods, Planning and Support Services, the Chief Officer Community Safety, Chief Superintendent Sam Millar, and the Leeds Divisional Commander, Chief Superintendent Paul Money.
7. This report summarises the key findings of this review and also presents the advice of the working group that met on 22nd January 2014 in respect of the Scrutiny Board's response to the Executive Board.

Key findings of the review

Existing funding for PCSOs

8. The Home Office provides funding to the Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner (OPCC) to provide a PCSO service across the whole of West Yorkshire. To maximise funding, the Commissioner is required to secure additional funds from other contributors, such as Local Authorities. The % formula applied to West Yorkshire is 70/30.
9. In 2013/14, the Council maintained its commitment to provide a 30% contribution towards the costs of 165 PCSOs across the city at a cost of up to £1.514m.
10. However, it was acknowledged that, in total, there are currently 310 PCSOs deployed across the city as PCSOs are funded from a range of other sources too. These include the OPCC, Area Committees, NHS Leeds, City Centre Markets, the White Rose Shopping Centre, some Parish Councils and ALMOs (now Housing Leeds). During this review it was reported that there were no planned reductions relating to these other funding contributors.
11. It was also acknowledged that the Police and Crime Commissioner had publicly pledged to protect and ring-fence £17.8m a year of police funding to continue to pay for PCSOs across West Yorkshire up until 2016. A statement had been published on the OPCC website dated 17th January 2014 and this

was tabled at the working group meeting on 22nd January 2014 (see appendix 1).

12. Whilst the working group welcomed this statement, it was still unclear at that time whether the Police and Crime Commissioner would maintain the same levels of funding towards local authority PCSOs where local authorities are planning to make reductions to their own contributions. It was highlighted that other West Yorkshire Local Authorities were considering proposals to reduce their funding contributions to PCSOs during 2014/15, with even higher percentage reductions being proposed.
13. As Divisional Commander for Leeds, Chief Supt Money confirmed during the working group meeting on 22nd January 2014 that he had made representation to the Police and Crime Commissioner and the Chief Constable to retain the same level of OPCC funding within Leeds. However, at that stage it was noted that this decision was yet to be confirmed by the Police and Crime Commissioner.
14. During the review it was also acknowledged that the West Yorkshire Police and Crime Panel would not be in a position to formally consider the Commissioner's 2014/15 Revenue and Capital Budget with Medium Term Financial Plan until its meeting on 7th February 2014.
15. The working group recognised that this was a fundamental factor in terms of the potential impact of the Council's proposed budgetary reductions on PCSO levels. It was highlighted that should the allocation of OPCC funding remain the same in Leeds, the Council's 9.9% budgetary reduction would result in five less PCSOs. However, should the Police and Crime Commissioner decide that the OPCC funding contribution will also reduce accordingly then this will result in a greater reduction of 16.5 PCSOs across the city.
16. Despite the absence of such clarity, there were differing opinions expressed by members of the working group surrounding the overall principle of a budgetary reduction relating to the provision of Council funded PCSOs. Some concerns were raised about the potential impact of any budgetary reduction. As such, it was felt that the Executive should be exploring other options across directorates to achieve the £150K budgetary saving to enable the Council to maintain its commitment in providing a 30% contribution towards the costs of 165 PCSOs across the city. In contrast to this, others acknowledged the difficulties facing all directorates in achieving the budgetary savings required by the Council and therefore supported the budgetary reduction in line with the principle that no service area should be exempt from this difficult process.

Proposed allocation models for Council funded PCSOs

17. During this review, consideration was given to an options paper relating to allocation models for Council funded PCSOs. In the absence of a firm commitment from the Police and Crime Commissioner that OPCC funding would be fully maintained for Leeds, it was noted that such models had been based around the potential reduction of 16.5 PCSOs across the city.
18. Council funded PCSOs are currently allocated on an equal 5 per ward basis across the city. Within the options paper, it was highlighted that a reduction of 16.5 PCSOs based on the current allocation model would result in 4.5 PCSOs per ward across the city. However, the £150,000 council reduction would only result in a reduction of 5 PCSOs hence the models would need to be reassessed.
19. However, the working group was invited to share opinions and suggestions around alternative allocation models. The options paper presented alternative models that were all based around the principle of having a dedicated flexible resource of PCSOs that would not be allocated to a particular ward area. Instead, this resource would be deployed against demand across the city. In terms of establishing a local PCSO footprint within each ward area, one model proposed an intelligence based approach linked to combined crime and Neighbourhood Policing Team confidence data for all 33 wards across Leeds. Other proposed models were based on the principle that there would be an equal distribution of the remaining PCSO resource across the 33 wards.
20. The working group agreed that the fundamental role of PCSOs is to contribute to the policing of neighbourhoods, primarily through highly visible patrols with the purpose of reassuring the public, tackling anti-social behaviour in public places and being accessible to communities and partner agencies working at local levels.
21. Whilst acknowledging that existing provision is currently based on having 5 PCSOs per ward, it was noted that the shift patterns of PCSOs (i.e. having an early shift, late shift and day off) and the impact of PCSO resources potentially being redirected to support other demand led projects when required, such as Operation Optimal, meant that in reality, there is actually less than 5 PCSOs currently deployed in a ward at any one time.
22. Chief Supt Money reiterated the importance of maintaining a policing footprint within each ward area to enable PCSOs to establish close working relationships with local communities. In acknowledging the need to currently re-direct resources when required, it was highlighted that should the facility to

access an appropriate level of dedicated PCSO resource be made available to flexibly deploy against other demands, this would help to secure other PCSOs within their allocated wards. However, it was noted that there are no plans to radically change the shift patterns of PCSOs.

23. In consideration of other alternative allocation models, some concerns were raised that certain wards would potentially have only one PCSO on duty where its allocated baseline is 3 PCSOs, particularly in view of existing shift patterns. There were also concerns that wards that have a larger geographical area, and particularly those with rural and semi-rural locations, would find any reduction in PCSO resource even more challenging to achieve an appropriate level of visible policing.
24. West Yorkshire Police allocate their PCSO cohort across their Neighbourhood Policing Teams (NPTs), of which there are currently 17 in total across Leeds. However, reference was made to the development of a new policing operational model that will result in 11 larger NPTs being established. Linked to this will be the identification of more community based hubs within which to base local frontline officers. It was highlighted that this new approach should enable PCSOs to commence and finish their shifts within their allocated communities, thereby reducing unnecessary travelling time and costs often associated with having more centralised bases.
25. Whilst the principle of moving towards more locally deployable bases was fully supported by the working group, there were differing opinions expressed in relation to the allocation model for Council funded PCSOs. Some members of the working group supported the principle of enabling greater flexibility and targeting resources appropriately to achieve maximum impact. As such, it was their preference to have an allocation model that creates a dedicated flexible resource to deploy against demand whilst establishing a local PCSO footprint within each ward area with an intelligence based approach. It was agreed that such intelligence should incorporate both crime and confidence data for all 33 wards across Leeds to reflect the role of PCSOs in terms of supporting frontline policing, but also providing reassurance to the public.
26. However, other members of the working group supported the principle of having an equal distribution of the full resource available across the city and therefore advised that the existing allocation model for Council funded PCSOs is retained, which currently reflects the allocation of 5 PCSOs in every ward in Leeds.

Enhancing the role of PCSOs to maximise environmental enforcement resources

27. The working group acknowledged that work has been on-going to develop a clear and effective Fixed Penalty Notice process that better allows PCSOs to contribute to environmental enforcement, particularly around issues such as litter, fly tipping and dog fouling. The Director of Environment and Housing confirmed that there are no income generation targets linked to environmental enforcement action and Chief Supt Money acknowledged that many environmental crimes are already linked to anti-social behaviour, which remains a key priority for Neighbourhood Policing Teams.
28. As such, importance was placed upon continuing to embed a shared understanding and ownership of neighbourhood issues at the frontline, by ensuring that both police and Council staff understand the most effective pathways to deal with environmental crime and other issues related to community confidence so that resources and opportunities for joint working are maximised.
29. Particular reference was made to maximising resources to help tackle noise nuisance across the city. Domestic noise nuisance represents a substantial proportion of complaints received by the Leeds Anti-Social Behaviour Team. Demand for the out of hours service is extremely high, and given the limited resource available to serve the whole of the city, it is not always possible to respond to every complaint with a visit or direct action. Whilst acknowledging that the general shift patterns of PCSOs restricts them to work beyond midnight, it was highlighted that opportunities could be explored to negotiate appropriate shift patterns for a number of PCSOs, linked closely to the principle of creating a dedicated PCSO resource to flexibly deploy against demand.
30. In line with the new policing operational model, it was also highlighted that particular emphasis will be around developing a more integrated partnership approach between police and other partners within neighbourhoods. Linked to the Council's own principles of locality working, importance will be placed on being more locally focussed and responsive to local issues and priorities, with decisions being taken collectively around how best to deploy resources to address a particular problem within a community. However, it was recognised that the success of this approach is heavily reliant on all partners being fully committed towards developing a culture and behaviours that will reflect this new way of working.
31. Whilst the working group was supportive of the principle to enhance the role of PCSOs to maximise environmental enforcement resources, it was mindful

of the expectations already placed upon PCSOs and so any additional functions will need to be managed effectively. Linked to this, the working group was particularly supportive of the principle of moving towards more locally deployable bases and developing a more integrated partnership approach between police and other partners within neighbourhoods to enable decisions being taken collectively around how best to deploy resources to address a particular problem within a community.

Advice of the working group to the Scrutiny Board

32. Those Board Members that attended the final working group meeting on 22nd January 2014 reflected on the above key issues raised during this review. In conclusion, the advice of the working group to the Safer and Stronger Communities Scrutiny Board in respect of its response to the Executive Board following this review is as follows:

The Council's funding contribution to PCSOs in Leeds

33. During the final meeting on 22nd January 2014, the working group was unable to reach a consensus in relation to the Council's funding contribution to PCSOs in Leeds. As such, there were two advisory positions put forward by the working group in respect of the Scrutiny Board's response to the Executive Board in this regard. There are:

Position one:

That the Scrutiny Board is not supportive of the proposed £150,000 (9.9%) budgetary saving during 2014/15 in relation to the Council's Service Level Agreement with the Office of the West Yorkshire Police and Crime Commissioner for the provision of PCSOs across the city.

Position two:

That the Scrutiny Board is supportive of the proposed £150,000 (9.9%) budgetary saving during 2014/15 in relation to the Council's Service Level Agreement with the Office of the West Yorkshire Police and Crime Commissioner for the provision of PCSOs across the city.

The allocation model for Council funded PCSOs in Leeds

34. The working group was also unable to reach a consensus in relation to the allocation model for Council funded PCSOs in Leeds. As such, there were two advisory positions put forward by the working group in respect of the Scrutiny Board's response to the Executive Board in this regard. These are:

Position one:

That the Scrutiny Board recommends to the Executive Board that it supports the continuation of the existing allocation model for Council funded PCSOs in terms of promoting an equal distribution of the full resource available across the city, which is currently reflected in the allocation of 5 PCSOs in every ward in Leeds.

Position two:

That the Scrutiny Board recommends to the Executive Board that a new allocation model is introduced during 2014/15 for Council funded PCSOs. This model should involve a dedicated flexible resource of PCSOs to be deployed against demand, with the remaining resource being allocated using an intelligence based approach linked to combined crime and Neighbourhood Policing Team confidence data for wards across Leeds. However, this model should also apply a minimum baseline of 3 PCSOs within each ward.

The role of PCSOs

35. Whilst there was consensus from the working group for the Scrutiny Board to support the principle of enhancing the role of PCSOs to maximise environmental enforcement resources, the Scrutiny Board should reiterate the need for any additional functions placed upon PCSOs to be managed effectively in view of the expectations already placed upon them. Linked to this, it was felt that the Scrutiny Board should also support the principle of moving towards more locally deployable bases and developing a more integrated partnership approach between police and other partners within neighbourhoods to enable decisions being taken collectively around how best to deploy resources to address a particular problem within a community.