

Police Accountability Board, Tuesday 7th May, Llandrindod Wells

The meeting took place in the Powys County Council Chamber, on what was the morning after the early Spring Bank Holiday. There was a strong turnout of staff with both the Commissioner and the Chief Constable, including Communications staff on both sides. Police and Crime Panel Members present were Cllr David Evans, Cllr Les George and myself.

The venue and the timing may account for the fact that no Member of the Public took advantage of the advertised opportunity at item 2 on the Agenda for 'Discussion with Members of the Public.' However, an innovative social media session with members of the wider public followed the meeting – I will return to that later.

The opening session of the meeting included some reflection on the lack of physical engagement with the public at that particular PAB meeting. The consensus was that this was far more difficult to achieve in a civic building, rather than in a community setting such as the experience at Crickhowell High School, Ysgol y Preseli and Ysgol Dyffryn Aman had demonstrated over the previous 12 months. The only other lack of engagement had occurred in Summer 2018 at Aberaeron when Ceredigion County Council had hosted the meeting. It was agreed that this needed further reflection, in terms of venue choice for future PABs.

The first substantive item involved the systematic review of issues that had come up on 12/02 at PAB. There followed lengthy consideration of the Force Performance Report for Quarter 4. Open discussion involving the Chief and other senior officers. The Commissioner referred to a 'missing granularity of detail' in some areas of the report. It was agreed that, in certain areas, it would be useful to incorporate feedback on community concerns in a 'mapped way' so that those interested could better understand and be reassured by Dyfed-Powys Police activity – and objectives met. The perceived importance of appropriate sharing of news was also flagged 'If it's not on Twitter, it hasn't happened' etc.

During the report discussion, the Commissioner expressed some concern on the transparency and effectiveness of the All Wales

Policing Group – and it was an area of consensus that this needed to improve.

There was considerable discussion around the Deep Dive Scrutiny report - on the Approach to Illegal Drugs - which, like the previous Deep Dive report, was seen as being of real value.

One particular point, which arose from that discussion, was in the area of Communications, where Ms Emma Northcote spoke of the potential for a certain ‘fatigue’ in the public, with regard to social media. She felt that community members were no longer content with ‘soft images’ of officers out and about at a local carnival, but were looking for news on progress around County Lines and other cutting edge issues. This point was also felt to be, in part, a consequence of saturation levels of coverage on issues such as Brexit and knife crime: ‘Don’t just TELL them...SHOW them what we’re doing.’

Another aspect that was mentioned was the public’s difficulty in understanding the respective roles of the Police and the role of the OPCC. This was acknowledged as an area for further consideration.

Following the close of the formal meeting at 12:30, the Commissioner and Chief, supported by the communications advisors, took part in a first Facebook Live Q and A session. This attracted considerable interest and a number of members of the public from across the force area engaged. Topics raised included approach to drugs policy and also how communities could most effectively share information and intelligence on potential criminal activity with officers.

The role of community policing, the 101 non-emergency line and the importance of Crimestoppers were all referred to. The level of interest extended beyond the time allocated – but commitments were made to follow up the particular contacts in greater depth. The session was deemed to have been a success – and would be further reviewed, ahead of future PAB meetings. It closed at 13:00

William Powell

May 2019