



Minutes

Title of meeting	Police Covenant Oversight Board
Date	19 February 2024
Time	14.15 – 15.15
Venue	Virtual Meeting
Attendees	<p>Chris Philp – Chair - Minister of State for Crime, Policing and Fire Gareth Wilson – Chief Police Officers’ Staff Association Nick Smart – President, Police Superintendents’ Association Ben Priestley – National Officer, Unison Peter McCall – Cumbria Police and Crime Commissioner David Wilbraham – Chair, Police Memorial Trust Andy Rhodes – Director, National Police Wellbeing Service John Harrison – Chief Medical Officer, College of Policing Nicola Faulconbridge – HMICFRS Donna Smith – HMICFRS Karin Phillips – Director of Community Safety, Welsh Government Harriet Mackinlay – Policy Team Lead, Home Office Iain Barton – Covenant governance lead, Home Office Chantelle Fields – Wellbeing lead, Home Office Katryna Welsh – Covenant policy team, Home Office</p>
Apologies	<p>John Robins – Chair, Chief Police Officers’ Staff Association Gavin Stephens – Chair, National Police Chiefs’ Council Chris Rowley – National lead for police wellbeing, National Police Chiefs’ Council Andy Marsh – CEO, College of Policing Steve Hartshorn – Chair, Police Federation of England and Wales Andy Tremayne – Senior Policy Manager, Association of Police and Crime Commissioners</p>

1) Welcome and introductory remarks

RT HON CHRIS PHILP MP, THE MINISTER OF STATE FOR CRIME, POLICING AND FIRE welcomed attendees. He emphasised the importance of continuing to make tangible progress on the Covenant which delivers for officers, staff and their families.

2) Police Covenant Annual Report

IAIN BARTON thanked the Board members for their feedback on the draft Covenant annual report. He noted that some feedback from members was still being incorporated in the draft text. He asked the Board to confirm they were content with the annual report and explained that it would be published in Parliament by the end of March. **ACTION – Home Office to check whether the PCC pre-election period, could affect the timing for publishing the Police Covenant Annual Report.**

3) Mental health crisis line

ANDY RHODES set out the plans to implement the crisis support line and confirmed a single-tender agreement with 'The Ambulance Staff Charity' (TASC) who were chosen as the existing provider of crisis lines to ambulance staff and the fire and rescue service. The new service would also allow for referrals for medical or counselling help for an individual in crisis. Andy explained that a proof of concept will begin in April 2024, starting with the North East region to test demand. The National Police Wellbeing Service (NPWS) would build a business case for this crisis line over the first year, detailing the full cost of the service to inform a full tender procurement exercise for 2024/2025. He also noted that the crisis line would provide some anonymised information to inform future policy, such as the number of near-misses and lives saved.

THE MINISTER OF STATE FOR CRIME, POLICING, AND FIRE asked whether the referrals for further interventions such as counselling would incur additional costs.

ANDY RHODES confirmed that the existing funding covered the crisis line and all referrals for interventions as TASC also provided the interventions. TASC plan to provide up to 6 sessions of counselling and would support the individual with access to the NHS for further support. There is no aim to refer these individuals to any of the existing charities or Occupational Health providers.

THE MINISTER OF STATE FOR CRIME, POLICING, AND FIRE asked whether this service is available to retired officers as well as serving officers.

ANDY RHODES responded that the service would not be generally available to retired police officers at this stage as the focus would be on gauging the demand levels to manage risk. He explained that it would be targeted at serving officers and staff only but noted that TASC were very clear that they would never not answer a call or refuse support for anyone within policing.

THE MINISTER OF STATE FOR CRIME, POLICING, AND FIRE asked when the service would be made available to all regions and whether there was funding to fulfil this within the current financial year.

ANDY RHODES confirmed that funding for this financial year would focus on proof of concept, followed by expansion incrementally across the country from April 2025. He also noted that by the end of 2024 they would assess the level of demand compared to capacity and find out the full cost of this service on a national scale to ensure sustainable funding is sourced. He explained that he anticipated demand would be around 200,000 people nationally requiring support per year, therefore sustainable funding would be required to continue to provide the service. Andy highlighted concerns of individuals on suspension or misconduct accessing the service as a risk factor.

THE MINISTER OF STATE FOR CRIME, POLICING, AND FIRE asked whether there would be any guidance available in the crisis line communications on the threshold for calling the support line.

ANDY RHODES responded to confirm that TASC would provide guidance to ensure it was clear who this new service will cover.

THE MINISTER OF STATE FOR CRIME, POLICING, AND FIRE thanked Andy for the progress on the mental health crisis line and asked for an update on the launch day.

ACTION - ANDY RHODES to update the Oversight Board and the Minister following the launch of the crisis line in April 2024.

4) Priority workstream 13, Clinical Governance Workstream, update

JOHN HARRISON summarised progress on the development of a national health and wellbeing strategy. He explained that the healthcare priorities agreed by the Board required a strategic approach and that work should build on the legal frameworks and national policies already in place. He noted that optimal health care support would be delivered through quality assured police occupational health services. John explained that the strategy was at an advanced stage, reinforced by research which should inform NPCC led interventions. He cautioned that further discussions were required to understand the cost of these interventions. He recommended that data collection must be used to inform the measurements of impact, return on investment and to help inform future initiatives. He noted that NHS engagement work had presented several challenges and that further work directly between Home Office and Department of Health and Social Care is now required to help push this forward. At a local level, workshops are organised for March 2024. He reported on the NHS commissioning pilots, which have found that Commissioners and senior police leaders need to be supported to ensure a better understanding of police needs and appropriate solutions. On healthcare accreditation, he explained that further work was required to understand the local healthcare landscape and to produce shared aims and guidance for healthcare providers to achieve a 'police aware' package of support. John notes that good progress had been made by all forces in achieving the foundation Occupational Health standards and forces were now working towards enhanced standards to be delivered by 2025. He cautioned that forces must continue to see this as a priority and recommended that this issue be raised on forces' risk registers and discussed at relevant senior meetings. He also raised concerns about the viability of some Occupational Health departments due to recruitment and retention issues. He has developed an occupational health workforce strategy paper which details how forces can work collaboratively to find a sustainable solution. John updated on the strategy for suicide prevention and postvention, led by Dr Yvonne Taylor. He raised concerns around the culture and stigma that still exists within policing around mental health and wellbeing. He reported that an action plan to tackle this culture needs to be delivered, in addition to the Wellbeing Authorised Professional Practice, which should drive organisational change. He asked that sustainable funding is agreed for the mental health crisis line.

THE MINISTER OF STATE FOR CRIME, POLICING, AND FIRE asked for a progress update on the NHS commissioning pilots in Gloucestershire and South Wales.

JOHN HARRISON confirmed progress had been made. The police now understood what was being asked of them, and there were four upcoming meetings organised with health commissioners and commissioning boards to discuss the health requirements of the police and barriers they face in treatment.

KARIN PHILLIPS noted that she appreciated South Wales being chosen for one of the pilots and that she appreciated the fact that that the letter from the Minister to the Secretary of State for Health had also been sent to the Welsh Health Department. Wales had been actively involved but welcomed ongoing engagement on this work to ensure Welsh Government support.

THE MINISTER OF STATE FOR CRIME, POLICING, AND FIRE asked whether there was a clearly articulated sense of the main health challenges and where the barriers were to police accessing the required treatments. The Minister noted the Department for Health and Social Care (DHSC) were willing to be supportive, within their existing budgets, but they would like to see robust evidence from the CMO, identifying the needs of the policing community, and evidence that these needs were not being appropriately met.

JOHN HARRISON explained there was a lack of clarity on what was required of the NHS by policing. This is in part because the NHS often likened the Police Covenant to the Armed Forces Covenant, despite there being differences between the two. On a local level, the NHS had been receptive, but the challenge was gathering a clear understanding of local needs in terms of health care delivery to create 'police aware' services. In relation to accreditation, he explained the aim of achieving a better understanding of the landscape by organising joined up delivery between the NHS and charities to create better support. He explained that, in his view, obtaining a clear picture of the scale of mental health demand through national data collection was the number one challenge at national level. At a local level he explained that it is possible to look at the numbers referred from occupational health services to the NHS, but that this is not possible in relation to ongoing care, since records are not currently tagged. This is something he would like to do in the future to influence health care commissioners. He also noted that general access to treatment was an issue and that timely access to specialist mental health services was needed to address concerns such as PTSD.

THE MINISTER OF STATE FOR CRIME, POLICING, AND FIRE noted the merit in considering how the NHS could identify police officers and staff when accessing services.

JOHN HARRISON confirmed that the GP veteran-friendly approach was already being looked into for policing. He reported that engagement with the Royal College of General Practitioners (RCGP) had taken place, and the main challenge was around the RCGP being willing to invest in taking this forward, as it would involve further education for GPs and changes to systems to allow GPs to tag individuals as police workforce. Currently, the approach would be to consider how this could be taken forward via local arrangements, followed by work with RCGP to create an educational package.

ANDY RHODES explained that the Armed Forces Covenant has significant senior strategic oversight at a national level. The Police Covenant works at a more local level which reflects the overall structure of policing, meaning it is easier to meet with partners, to discuss concerns, and find solutions to suit local needs. Andy noted two health care challenges facing policing: firstly, that in contrast to the NHS, policing does not have many in-house specialists such as trauma counsellors; and, secondly, support provided by A&E services nationally has not been consistent. The Armed Forces had made progress in getting quality prosthetics provided in a timely manner as that was one of their biggest health requirements, whereas in policing, more progress is needed in providing better care for mental and physical injuries caused on duty.

THE MINISTER OF STATE FOR CRIME, POLICING, AND FIRE asked what the next steps would be to replicate the national strategic relationship and leadership used in the Armed Forces.

ANDY RHODES proposed convening a meeting with DHSC to discuss how national governance would work.

ACTION – Home Office to work with DHSC officials to organise a meeting with NHS senior leaders, Andy Rhodes and John Harrison to discuss police health needs and challenges accessing NHS support.

PETER McCALL noted the length of time it had taken to develop the Armed Forces provision to the current level. He noted that many medics who were deployed directly to support veterans were employed by the NHS, which helped form a greater understanding of what the Armed Forces required and why. He also referred to a practice whereby NHS services proactively ask whether someone is Armed Forces personnel or veteran, and that replicating this for policing would provide a tangible benefit. He also noted that Cumbria Police and Cumbria Fire were pooling resources for occupational health, which appeared to be working well.

THE MINISTER OF STATE FOR CRIME, POLICING, AND FIRE thanked John and Andy for all of the great work that had been progressed.

5) Workplace civility

ANDY RHODES summarised the special senior stakeholder briefing given to PCOB members on 8 January by Prof Les Graham on his meta-analysis of police wellbeing surveys. He highlighted the key issues including: derogatory comments, sexism, misogyny and particular issues for individuals with protected characteristics. The results of the report were consistent with findings by HMICFRS, previous diversity and inclusion studies commissioned by the NPWS and the UNISON Survey around sexism and misogyny. He noted there are several relevant workstreams in existence within the NPCC and College of Policing (CoP) that could be informed by this research and that Prof Graham's report had been circulated to all workstream leads. He noted the behaviour change workstream within CoP, which would pilot a new approach in the Metropolitan Police Service and Gwent Police and may be a workstream of interest to the Board in the future. Andy noted that Prof Graham's report findings linked internal stressors and intention to quit. He proposed that he would first circulate the report to the relevant workstream leads and then work with Gavin Stephens and Andy Marsh to bring all leads from the workstreams together to hear from Prof Les Graham, discuss how best to address the issues highlighted in the report and decide how the Police Covenant can support the work needed.

BEN PRIESTLEY agreed that the report highlighted important issues and supported Andy's plan of action for moving forwards. He noted that the findings of the report also underpin everything the Covenant is doing and that if the police service was not a welcoming and supportive environment, then this would have long term consequences.

NICOLA FAULCONBRIDGE confirmed that HMICFRS were aware of the issues highlighted in the report and were willing to do whatever is necessary to expedite and support this piece of work.

ANDY RHODES highlighted concerns around data collection and analysis. He noted that annual surveys as a form of data collection may not always be effective, as respondents can suffer 'survey fatigue' and there can be delays in getting results out. He also noted the large variation in the response rates by force, with only 18 forces getting a response rate of over 15% in the latest National Wellbeing Survey. Consideration was being given to whether new technological solutions could be piloted to collect data.

THE MINISTER OF STATE FOR CRIME, POLICING, AND FIRE agreed that the suggestion for utilising technology was worth exploring and recommended Andy should discuss this with the NPCC and that it was important to increase the response rate. The Minister noted that the majority of the issues raised in the report were cultural issues relating to leadership through the command structure which have been referenced in various other reports and emphasised the importance of senior leaders taking action to address the issues quickly. He asked whether anything further was needed to encourage this.

ANDY RHODES agreed that leadership and supervision are key, particularly in relation to the quality of line management, and that this is already considered in HMICFRS inspections. He noted that some forces were taking an innovative approach to line manager development and that the data on these issues had begun to change within forces who had invested time and effort into this.

NICOLA FAULCONBRIDGE confirmed that leadership was one of the key aspects of the PEEL inspections and Chief Constables were very aware of the importance of maintaining standards at all ranks, as forces are held accountable when not meeting requires standards. There had been an investment in frontline leadership, particularly sergeants and inspectors.

ACTION – Andy Rhodes to work with Gavin Stephens and Andy Marsh to bring respective workstreams together to use the Covenant to highlight internal cultural issues and potential avenues for change.

ANDY RHODES noted that the annual wellbeing survey was scheduled to be circulated in May and collective communications from the Board members and the Minister would increase awareness and improve future response rates. Andy emphasised that the survey was part of each force's business plan and not a standalone issue.

PETER McCALL asked if HMICFRS were able to monitor how forces progress with survey response rates, as that would get the attention of Chief Constables.

NICOLA FAULCONBRIDGE cautioned that it may be challenging but highlighted the importance of forces sharing best practice with other forces. Nicola noted that HMICFRS also holds influence with Chief Constables, and she will discuss this option with the Board.

THE MINISTER OF STATE FOR CRIME, POLICING, AND FIRE noted that PEEL already included leadership elements but agreed that access to limited data makes this challenging and, therefore the wellbeing survey response rate was worth considering as part of leadership inspections. Forces with response rates above 15% would benefit from a detailed analysis, which would provide a benchmark to assess what measures forces have taken to improve. The Minister noted that this would provide data which could be monitored and built into the evaluation for the inspection for each force's leadership quality, instead of interviewing individual Chief Constables and Chiefs of Staff.

NICOLA FAULCONBRIDGE confirmed that as part of their inspection data collection, HMICFRS also conduct focus groups and issue their own workforce survey. All evidence is then triangulated to assess each force. Nicola noted that she will feed this suggestion back for consideration for the 2025/27 PEEL planning, which HMICFRS were currently organising, to decide how best to support the inspection and the welfare of the police workforce.

GARETH WILSON confirmed he is aware that all evidence is scrutinised and triangulated as part of the PEEL inspection. He agreed that there were some topics which should be at the top of the priority list for HMICFRS's inspection and it would be beneficial to know what the survey response rates were. He explained that there were leadership issues within higher executive levels too, as Chief Police Officers' Staff Association (CPOSA) survey results show they also face similar issues around culture and leadership. This is information that CPOSA continues to tackle and act upon as a staff association.

6) AOB

THE MINISTER OF STATE FOR CRIME, POLICING, AND FIRE asked for an update on the Police Covenant tangibles benefits list which was discussed at a previous Board.

IAIN BARTON confirmed the shortlist of tangible ideas agreed by the Board was being further considered by officials and we should be in a position to update members at the next Board.

ACTION – Home Office to provide an update at the next Board on the shortlist of proposed tangible benefits.

THE MINISTER OF STATE FOR CRIME, POLICING, AND FIRE noted the high number of police officers on long-term sick, recuperative duties or adjusted duties which represented around 12% of the total police workforce in England and Wales. He noted that some of the topics discussed in this meeting should help address this issue and get police officers back on frontline duties more quickly. He thanked everyone for the continued work and engagement.