

Devon and Cornwall Police and Crime Panel

Background

Police and Crime Panels were established in every police force area from November 2012. They are scrutiny bodies with a range of statutory duties and the responsibility for scrutinising and supporting the Police and Crime Commissioners' activities over a range of policy areas.

Early this year, the Vice-chairman of the Overview and Scrutiny Board sought clarification of the make-up of the Devon and Cornwall Police and Crime Panel in relation to the numbers of scrutiny councillors and executive councillors on the Panel. At that point (i.e. before the council elections for some authorities in the area in May), the majority of councillors who made up the Panel were executive members.

As a result of this finding, the Vice-chairman asked that the other scrutiny committees in the area be contacted to determine whether these committees were seeking feedback from their members on the Panel.

Of the five authorities that responded, two had had feedback from their member to the appropriate overview and scrutiny committee (Devon County Council and North Devon District Council) and three had not (Cornwall Council, Plymouth City Council and Exeter City Council).

Implications

Within its terms of reference, the Overview and Scrutiny Board can:

Consider all matters and issues arising from the Council's power to review or scrutinise decisions made, or other action taken, in connection with the discharge by the responsible authorities of their crime and disorder functions in accordance with the Police and Justice Act 2006.

This means that the Community Safety Partnership is subject to scrutiny by the Board. In order to avoid duplication, the Overview and Scrutiny Board (and the equivalent committees in other authorities within Devon and Cornwall) should work together with the Police and Crime Panel in identifying issues of mutual interest and concern, ensuring the Panel is plugged in to local-level issues within the force area and sharing evidence.

Whilst there is no suggestion that scrutiny committees should hold the Police and Crime Panel to account, Torbay Council's Member/Officer Support Compact states that members will provide regular feedback from the outside organisations they are appointed as Council representatives to other members and officers.

A question was put at the last meeting of the Council to Mayor about when and how he would be providing feedback to members.

Future Scrutiny

In considering its Work Programme, the Overview and Scrutiny Board may wish to consider how it ensures effective links with the Police and Crime Panel and whether it wishes to carry out a review of an issue which falls under the remit of the Community Safety Partnership.

(At the last meeting of the Panel, it was agreed that priority for the coming year would be the Police and Crime Commissioner's commissioning arrangements.)