

Northamptonshire Police, Fire and Crime Panel

Minutes of a meeting of the Northamptonshire Police, Fire and Crime Panel held at Meeting Room G01, One Angel Square, Angel Street, Northampton NN1 1ED on Thursday 27 November 2025 at 10.00 am.

Present:

Councillor Mark Arnall (Chair)
Dr Carolyn Kus (Vice-Chair)
Councillor Richard Butler
Councillor Sally Keeble
Councillor Daniel Lister
Councillor Craig Morris
Councillor Barbara Jenney
Councillor Chris Kellett
Miss Pauline Woodhouse

Substitute Members:

Councillor Graham Cheatley
Councillor Vinnie Whitrow
Councillor James Towns

Also Present:

Danielle Stone, Northamptonshire Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner
Jonny Bugg, Chief Executive and Monitoring Officer, Office of the Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner
Vaughan Ashcroft, Chief Finance and Section 151 Officer, Office of the Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner
Deborah Denton, Joint Head of Communications, Office of the Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner
Councillor James Petter, West Northamptonshire Council
Councillor Christine Ware, West Northamptonshire Council
Sam Dobbs, Chair, Northamptonshire Police Federation
Julia Rickards, Head of Legal (People), West Northamptonshire Council
James Edmunds, Democratic Services Assistant Manager, West Northamptonshire Council
Diana Davies, Democratic Services Officer, West Northamptonshire Council

There were also six members of the public in attendance.

The Chair opened the extraordinary meeting of the Panel, noting that it had been called in light of the recent case in the Court of Appeal involving the Chief Constable of Northamptonshire Police. The meeting had been requested by Panel members and had the support of the Chair and Vice Chair.

345. Apologies for Absence and Notification of Substitute Members

Apologies for non-attendance were received from Councillors Eddie McDonald, Andy Sims and Emily Fedorowycz, with Councillors Graham Cheatley, Vinnie Whitrow and James Towns substituting respectively, and from Mr Andy Frost.

Apologies for non-attendance were also received from the Director of Governance and Monitoring Officer of West Northamptonshire Council.

346. Notification of requests from members of the public to address the meeting

None received.

347. Declarations of Interest

Councillor Cheatley declared that he had worked with Mr Ivan Balhatchet, the Chief Constable of Northamptonshire Police, around 30 years ago.

Councillor Morris declared that he had served as a police officer alongside Mr Balhatchet many years before but had no current connection with him.

348. Chair's Announcements

The Chair thanked Panel members for their attendance at the extraordinary meeting.

At the Chair's invitation the Head of Legal (People) provided background information on the matter before the Panel, making the following points:

- The matter related to the arrest of Ms Nadine Buzzard-Quashie by Northamptonshire Police in September 2021. Following that arrest Ms Buzzard-Quashie made a complaint to the Information Commissioner's Office (ICO). The ICO made an order that all police body-worn video footage should be handed over to her. Northamptonshire Police failed to comply with that order.
- A county court judge subsequently made an order that all police body-worn video footage should be handed over. Northamptonshire Police also failed to comply with that order.
- Ms Buzzard-Quashie had therefore brought contempt proceedings against the Chief Constable. That application was defended by the Chief Constable, who stated that the force had supplied all police body-worn video footage that it still retained. Judgement confirmed that the force had not complied with the order but the judge declined to hold the Chief Constable in contempt as the judge could not be sure that the force had not supplied all of the footage.
- Ms Buzzard-Quashie appealed that judgement. The Chief Constable then conducted a data audit, which revealed the existence of further footage that ought to have been disclosed in accordance with the county court order. Consequently, the day before the appeal hearing the Chief Constable conceded the appeal.
- Mr Balhatchet was appointed as Chief Constable of Northamptonshire Police in February 2025, having held the role of Acting Chief Constable since October 2023.

349. **Response by the Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner to Court of Appeal judgement**

The Chair reiterated that the extraordinary meeting had been called following a request from four Panel members in accordance with the Panel's Rules of Procedure.

The Chair then invited the Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner (PFCC) to comment on actions she had taken in response to the Court of Appeal judgement in the case of Buzzard-Quashie versus the Chief Constable of Northamptonshire Police. The Chair thanked the PFCC for her attendance at the extraordinary meeting.

The PFCC made the following opening points:

- She thanked the Panel for arranging an additional meeting on this matter, which was better dealt with separately than at the scheduled Panel meeting on 4 December.
- She had great respect for Ms Buzzard-Quashie, who had shown significant resolve and integrity in pursuing her case. It was unacceptable that it had taken four years to get to the current position.
- The Chief Constable had taken responsibility for failings within Northamptonshire Police in relation to this case. He had not been aware of the situation until 22 October, which raised significant questions. The Chief Constable had then notified the Office of the PFCC (OPFCC) about the matter on 3 November, which was the date when he had been required to respond to the Court of Appeal.
- She had been briefed on the matter by the OPFCC Monitoring Officer on 4 and 5 November and had decided to make a voluntary referral to the Independent Office for Police Conduct (IOPC) on 6 November.
- She had formally considered suspending the Chief Constable at this point but had decided not to do so.
- The OPFCC Monitoring Officer had advised the Chair of the Panel, the host authority Monitoring Officer and HMICFRS about the situation at this point.
- The IOPC informed the PFCC on 12 November that it did not intend to carry out an investigation as it considered the civil contempt of court finding by the Court of Appeal related to the Chief Constable as a corporation sole not as an individual. However, the PFCC was advised to keep the matter under review as legal matters progressed.
- The £50,000 fine against Northamptonshire Police set by the Court of Appeal recognised that the Chief Constable was only aware of the matter at a late stage and had not been sanctioned as an individual. She considered that this validated the decision taken not to suspend the Chief Constable.
- She had made a further voluntary referral to the IOPC on 25 November for completeness, to demonstrate transparency and to provide independent oversight.
- The Chief Constable had taken a range of action to address issues relating to this case. A gold group had been set up to oversee the response to it. A peer review by another force had been commissioned. The retention time for all body-worn video footage had been extended and an audit of other cases involving such footage had been commissioned. The force had made a voluntary referral of officers and staff members to the IOPC.

- As PFCC she felt the need for additional independent assurance beyond the actions taken by the Chief Constable. She therefore intended to commission an independent review, which would be led by the Deputy PFCC. She wanted to set out the scope and terms of reference for the review before Christmas and for the review to report back as soon as possible in 2026, subject to taking into account the results of the work commissioned by the Chief Constable. She would provide reports to the Panel on these two stages before and after Christmas respectively.
- The independent review would look at how this matter had occurred and the remedial action now being taken by the Chief Constable with the aim of giving assurance that no such situation could occur again.

The Panel considered the comments by the PFCC and Panel members made the following points during the course of discussion:

- The information that the PFCC had provided was helpful.
- It was questioned how the PFCC would seek to rebuild public trust in policing following this matter, to mitigate the potential effect of it on police recruitment and to move Northamptonshire Police forward as an organisation that served all groups in the local community.
- Reassurance was sought that the review proposed by the PFCC would be sufficiently independent. It was questioned whether the Panel could be involved in developing the scope and terms of reference, which would help to support public trust and confidence in the openness of the review.
- The matter would have a significant impact on the reputation of Northamptonshire Police in addition to the cost of the fine imposed.
- The PFCC was challenged whether it would be more appropriate for her personally to lead the independent review.
- It was a challenging situation to have a chief constable who had been found in contempt of court. The criminal justice system would be undermined if members of the public were not confident that the police respected the courts.
- It had been reported in the media that the Chief Constable had missed the deadline for submitting to court a personal witness statement. This was very surprising in the circumstances and should be considered by the independent review.
- It was concerning that the Chief Constable had apparently not been aware of this case until a late stage. It was very surprising to hear that he was never informed of it over an extended period of time. When a new strategic leader took up their post they would normally ask to be informed about key issues and risks for their organisation. Strategic leaders did not want to be in the position of being surprised by significant issues.
- The actions now being taken by the PFCC seemed a correct and robust response.
- A Panel member's own experience in policing was that when a significant problem occurred it was widely known about and discussed within a force and rare for a chief constable not to know anything about it.
- A peer review by another force should be led by an individual who had no professional connections with the Chief Constable.
- This case involved actions that had amounted to contempt of court not just administrative errors. It raised serious questions about the operation and culture

of Northamptonshire Police. The matter should be subject to a systemic and genuinely independent review to rebuild trust in policing.

- It was questioned whether there had been an audit of high-risk litigation concerning Northamptonshire Police when Mr Balhatchet had become Acting Chief Constable, or when the PFCC had taken office. It was questioned whether the PFCC had received a handover briefing about any high-risk litigation.
- A Panel member commented that they had previously heard about the case that had led to the current matter, which made it more difficult to believe that the Chief Constable had been unaware of it.
- A senior leader should take responsibility if problems arose with their organisation.
- Mr Balhatchet had served with Northamptonshire Police throughout his career, which made it harder to believe he had only learnt of this matter at a late stage.
- A gold group might include senior officers who had previously been involved in Ms Buzzard-Quashie's case. A review by another police force would not be seen as transparent or objective by members of the public.
- The £50,000 fine imposed on Northamptonshire Police would be paid from public money. In this situation taxpayers could not reasonably be asked to provide additional funding for policing in the next year.
- If the independent review included an opportunity for members of the public to be involved this would assist in providing reassurance about its effectiveness.
- This case involved information not being shared with the Chief Constable. The scope of the independent review should therefore include looking at the organisational culture of Northamptonshire Police.
- The PFCC was challenged about the level of public trust in the competence and integrity of policing in Northamptonshire. This matter coming to light had coincided with the previous Chief Constable appearing in court on charges of fraud and misconduct in public office. It was not a sufficient response just to tell residents that action would be taken to prevent such issues from occurring again.
- It was questioned whether Mr Balhatchet would now pass police vetting following the Court of Appeal judgement.
- The government had announced the abolition of Police and Crime commissioners in 2028. The PFCC was asked to comment on whether scrutiny of policing in Northamptonshire could improve without this step being taken.

The PFCC made the following points during the course of discussion:

- It was right to highlight the importance of public trust in policing. She was very angry about the effect that this matter would have after the significant amount of work that had been done to engage with communities in the county and build up trust and confidence in policing.
- She would seek to be open with the Panel and with members of the public about the findings from the independent review. The OPFCC was independent from Northamptonshire Police and the review would have an independent person supporting it.
- Leaders of large organisations like a police force worked at a strategic level and could not know the details of every activity. The issue in this case was why the Chief Constable had not been informed earlier about a serious matter that had been ongoing for four years. This was unacceptable, as was not responding to a court order.

- She and the Deputy PFCC remained committed to action on equalities issues. Significant work had been done in areas such as recruitment and this would continue.
- As PFCC she had been up-front about the issues she had found after taking office, including the need to dismiss the previous Chief Constable, the loss of neighbourhood policing and the closure of police stations in the county. She was acting to rectify these issues but it would take time. She had also carried out significant engagement activity with local communities. Mr Balhatchet had played a large part in this work.
- The Deputy PFCC had investigative experience that made her well-qualified to lead the independent review. The PFCC would retain oversight of and accountability for the review.
- The contempt of court finding was a civil not a criminal sanction and not against the Chief Constable as an individual. This was reflected in the decision by the IOPC not to investigate the matter further.
- The timeliness of documents being sent to the court was a significant issue in relation to this case and one of great concern to her. The reasons why documents had arrived late after being submitted to the legal team needed to be understood. It was unacceptable to deal with a court in this way.
- When Mr Balhatchet was appointed as Chief Constable his focus was to understand the culture of policing in Northamptonshire and improve it where necessary. He had taken a bold approach, reflected in his first Policing Plan. He had emphasised to leadership teams at all levels of the force the principles of ethical policing, openness, honesty and owning mistakes. Despite this, he had still never been informed of Ms Buzzard-Quashie's case, which was unacceptable.
- Ms Buzzard-Quashie's case should have been resolved in 2021. The need now was to understand why this had not happened. The PFCC aimed to provide answers to the public on this in the New Year.
- She spoke regularly with Northamptonshire Police teams, the Police Federation and the superintendents' organisation. This provided many opportunities in which officers might have raised Ms Buzzard-Quashie's case with her but it never had been. She believed the Chief Constable when he said the same applied to him.
- This matter left her feeling furious rather than embarrassed. Trust and confidence in policing was vital, which was why she needed to know what had occurred.
- The OPFCC was independent from Northamptonshire Police. The review she commissioned would look at what had gone wrong in relation to this matter and who had been involved. It was crucial to ensure that after this situation had occurred once it could not happen again.
- Northamptonshire Police would be inspected early in 2026. This inspection would look at how the force operated at different levels and she looked forward to seeing its conclusions.
- Members of the public could take some comfort from the actions already put in place by the Chief Constable to address issues relating to this case. Her decision to commission an independent review reflected the need for an additional level of assurance on a matter as important as this. An independent person would be engaged to support the Deputy PFCC in carrying out the review.
- She was not aware of any previous media coverage of Ms Buzzard-Quashie's case before now.

- Northamptonshire Police had now provided all of the body-worn video footage relating to Ms Buzzard-Quashie's case.
- She would ensure that the independent review considered the question of whether an audit of high-risk litigation concerning Northamptonshire Police had been carried out when Mr Balhatchet had become Acting Chief Constable. She had not been in-post at that time.
- She had not carried out an audit or received a handover briefing on any high-risk litigation after being elected. If the OPFCC had been aware of this specific case she would have expected to be advised of it. The PFCC was not responsible for operational policing matters.
- The Panel member who said they had prior knowledge about the case that led to the matter was invited to speak with the independent review. It would be concerning if they had known about it but not said anything to the PFCC, who could have taken action.
- Mr Balhatchet had not spent his entire career with Northamptonshire Police: he had also served with the Metropolitan Police. He had not been serving with Northamptonshire Police when the case involving Ms Buzzard-Quashie had occurred in 2021.
- The gold group on this matter would be chaired by a senior officer who was newly appointed to Northamptonshire Police.
- The OPFCC gave significant attention to engaging with members of the public and had an ongoing programme of engagement activities. The independent review was intended to be as forensic as possible. She did not anticipate that members of the public would be directly involved in it. However, more general public engagement work by the OPFCC would continue and would inform her ongoing scrutiny of the Chief Constable.
- The independent review would seek to identify if there were any cultural issues at Northamptonshire Police that caused blockages in information-sharing and to address them.
- She had not seen any evidence from the government demonstrating that the Police and Crime commissioner model had failed. There were examples from across England and Wales of it producing excellent work. There should be a proper evaluation of the model's effectiveness. She would be in favour of an alternative approach if it could be shown to work better.

The OPFCC Chief Executive advised during discussion that the sanction by the Court of Appeal was a non-criminal matter and therefore would not have an impact on the legal framework concerning fitness to be a chief constable. However, a vetting review of Mr Balhatchet would be re-run to provide assurance.

Panel members reiterated the request for the Panel to know who would be involved in the independent review and to be able to see and have an input in its scope and terms of reference. The PFCC advised that the scope and terms of reference would be produced in the next few weeks and would be shared with the Panel as soon as they were available. The PFCC emphasised that it would not be appropriate for Panel members to be involved in carrying out the review, given that the Panel's remit was to scrutinise the PFCC. It was clarified that the Panel was not seeking this but to have an input as a critical friend in the scope and terms of reference. The PFCC indicated that she was content with this.

RESOLVED that: the Panel requests to have an opportunity to see and comment on the scope and terms of reference for the Police, Fire and Commissioner's independent review of the circumstances that resulted in the Chief Constable of Northamptonshire Police being found in contempt of court before these are finalised.

350. **Urgent Business**

There was none.

The meeting closed at 11.10 am

Chair: _____

Date: _____