



Policy manifesto

March 2021

By John Smith, Avon & Somerset's Independent candidate for Police and Crime Commissioner

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1. KEEPING THE PARTY POLITICS OUT OF POLICING

Policing should be about keeping residents safe, not party politics. Should you elect me as Avon & Somerset's next independent Police and Crime Commissioner, I will keep the party politics out of policing, answering only to local residents and businesses instead of politicians in Westminster.

My independence, experience, and proven track record of over 10 years as Chief Executive and Deputy Police and Crime Commissioner in Avon & Somerset make me the best choice for your next Police and Crime Commissioner.

Avon and Somerset Police has faced significant challenges in recent years. Central Government funding cuts of almost one third between 2010 and 2018 have led to over 700 fewer police officers across the area – a cut of 22% overall. The ongoing COVID-19 pandemic has also presented new challenges for policing throughout 2020, which we will continue to see persist throughout 2021.

In light of these challenges, the Government's announcement in 2019 of funding for an extra 20,000 officers nationally by March 2023 is welcome. However, recruiting and training a fully qualified police officer takes 3 years and Avon and Somerset are starting from a significantly lower number of officers than 10 years ago. This means that by 2026, Avon and Somerset Police will only have returned to the same fully trained officer numbers they had in operation in 2010. Significant challenges for our police force therefore remain.

Last year Avon and Somerset Police was assessed as one of the top 5 performing police forces in England and Wales by Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary in. This is testament to the hard work and leadership shown by the Chief Constable and his officers and staff over the last 10 years.

Though challenges remain, this performance combined with extra Government funding presents a great opportunity to rebuild Avon and Somerset Police back stronger than ever. Returning officer numbers to the levels they were 10 years ago combined with newer practices and a focus on what local people really want can help to significantly reduce crime and target offenders over the next 4 years, which is what I pledge to focus on if elected. My experience and independence make me the best candidate to oversee this investment and ensure it delivers real benefits to local people.

If elected, my priority will be to **keep the people of Avon and Somerset safe**. I will do this by:

- Tackling **knife and drug crime**, including "County Lines"
- Catching **burglars** and reducing burglaries
- Combating **anti-social behaviour**
- Championing Avon and Somerset to become **the most inclusive police force in the country**
- Improving **road safety**
- Preventing **fraud and cyber crime**
- Addressing **rural crime** and supporting rural communities
- Working in partnership to address **business crime**



2. My priorities: STRONG, RESPONSIVE, VISIBLE LOCAL POLICING

Despite losing more than 700 officers over 10 years due to Government funding cuts, Avon and Somerset Police has prioritised local policing numbers, managing to maintain neighbourhood “bobbies on the beat” and Police Community Support Officer levels. With the additional Government investment, I will make delivering a strong, responsive and visible local policing presence for local residents my priority. This would mean:

Tackling knife and drug crime, including County Lines

Drug crime is a root cause of burglary and knife crime and I know from my experience how concerning it is to local people. Tackling it needs a proactive approach to enforcement alongside prevention and treatment action that we know works. Avon and Somerset Police established Operation Remedy to focus on these issues alongside burglary and Sue Mountstevens, the current independent Police and Crime Commissioner, set up successful Violence Reduction Units across the area in 2019. Though COVID-19 has had an impact and there remains more to do, the initial results have been impressive: NHS admissions for under 25s with knife injuries down 25%, serious violence down 11% and a 20% reduction in County Lines. I will make it my priority to continue investment in these successful teams, reducing knife and drug crime further.

For more information, please visit: <https://johnsmith4pcc.com/working-proactively-together-in-avon-and-somerset-to-end-the-normalisation-of-serious-youth-violence/>

Preventing and catching burglars

I know from personal experience the impact that burglary has on victims – my family and I were the victims of a burglary 15 years ago. Catching and convicting burglars remains challenging but it is a high priority of mine. Burglary has fallen significantly since Operation Remedy was set up - by 8% before the pandemic and considerably more since - and the conviction rate has nearly doubled. If elected, I would go further by investing in an enhanced Offender Management, scheme targeting burglars with a ‘carrot and stick’ approach, meaning support for those who ‘go straight’ but a swift recall to prison for those that reoffend.

Taking anti-social behaviour seriously

Not feeling safe in your own home or neighbourhood is a soul-destroying experience. In my current role, I have heard directly from the victims of anti-social behaviour about how harrowing it is. I know from my experience that supporting victims and helping them to capture evidence of anti-social behaviour can really help resolve problems. If you elect me, I will ensure tackling anti-social behaviour remains a priority for the police and I will place a focus on partnership working with groups such as Avon and Somerset Watch and voluntary sector support groups.

Championing Avon and Somerset to become the most inclusive police force in the country

The foundation of policing in the United Kingdom is policing by consent. This means policing can only be truly effective with the support of people from all our communities. Working to ensure that Avon



and Somerset Police reflects the local people it serves and that they police all communities fairly and appropriately is a personal priority that I would focus on throughout my term in office. Good progress has been made in recent years. This has included working in partnership with our communities, establishing scrutiny panels to review videos of police use of powers, setting up the Avon and Somerset Lammy Review to look at disproportionality, and Avon and Somerset becoming the first police force in the UK to secure the National Equality Standard in 2020. There is still more to do and achieving this will be one of my priorities if elected.

Prioritising road safety

Road Safety is one of the most common issues local residents raise with me and the PCC team. Since 2014, the number of people killed or seriously injured has fallen by 20% but still more than 1 person per week is killed on our roads. If elected, I will continue to prioritise addressing the four causes of road deaths – drink and drug driving, speeding, mobile phone use and incorrect use of seatbelts. I will do this by maintaining or increasing the number of enforcement vehicles, working with local Community Speed Watch groups, and promoting mutual respect for all road users.

You can read more about my track record and the approach I would take here:

www.johnsmith4pcc.com/why-road-safety-matters-so-much-to-local-people/

Tackling fraud including cyber crime

Fraud and cyber crime are the most common crimes committed in the UK, and cyber crime has increased significantly during the COVID-19 pandemic. These crimes are often targeted at the most vulnerable people in our society and can have a devastating financial and psychological impact on victims. Fraud needs a combined local, regional, national, and international approach to fully tackle it. If elected I will make sure there is more focus on prevention and additional resources are made available to support victims in our area.

Police support for our rural communities

Residents and businesses in rural communities are more geographically isolated, which can make them more vulnerable to crime. Avon and Somerset Police already has a strong Rural Affairs Team made up of officers and staff who understand and value the countryside, but I believe they need more resources. If you elect me, I will ensure that the Rural Affairs Team has what it needs to support rural communities and catch the criminals who target them.

Working in partnership to address business crime

Successful businesses are the lifeblood of a successful local economy, helping to generate jobs and prosperity. Businesses have had an incredibly difficult time during the COVID-19 pandemic as the usual challenges they face are exacerbated. They need support to recover and if elected I will work with the Chief Constable to assign additional resources to tackle shoplifting and assaults on staff, and to continue existing initiatives to engage and support local businesses such as the Avon and Somerset Business Crime Forum and the various Business Improvement Districts and Business Crime Reduction Partnerships that already operate across the area.



3. PROTECTING THE MOST VULNERABLE FROM HARM

One of the most important things the police do is to protect vulnerable people from crime and to help those that are sadly victims of crime. I will work with the police to get the support that vulnerable people in Avon and Somerset need, including:

Supporting victims and targeting offenders of domestic abuse

There were nearly 20,000 domestic abuse-related crimes in Avon and Somerset in 2020 with most victims being women and children. Over recent years the Police and Crime Commissioner has invested in services to support victims of domestic abuse as well as programmes to work with offenders. If you elect me, I will work with the police and other partners to continue to prioritise supporting victims of domestic abuse, and increase the targeting of offenders. I will also pledge to both reduce the numbers of these crimes being committed while at the same time increasing the reporting of these crimes by victims.

Protecting children from exploitation including child sexual exploitation

The criminal exploitation of children and young people through for example County Lines or child sexual exploitation is an abhorrent crime. I have worked throughout my time as part of the Police and Crime Commissioner team to introduce an Avon and Somerset-wide specialist support service for victims of Child Sexual Exploitation. We have also worked with the police to introduce a multi-agency approach to identifying and safeguarding vulnerable children called Operation Topaz, which I will continue to champion.

A zero-tolerance approach to hate crimes

Avon and Somerset is a diverse and, for the most part, tolerant and inclusive area. However, there were over 3,500 recorded hate crimes in the area in 2020, and racial hate crime increased by 20%. Being attacked in your own community because of, for example, your race or sexual orientation, is an awful and unacceptable crime. Avon and Somerset Police has worked in partnership with organisations such as Stand Against Racism and Inequality to transform its approach in identifying and supporting victims of hate crime. I will continue to champion this crucial work to make sure all hate crimes are handled proactively and fairly in the future and that all communities feel equally safe.

Improving support for victims of rape and serious sexual offences

In Avon and Somerset, like other areas across the country, the number of rape and serious sexual offences reported has increased, while the number of convictions for these crimes has been falling. The Criminal Justice System is not serving victims of these traumatic crimes well. The Avon and Somerset Deputy Chief Constable is the national lead for these offences and is piloting a new approach with the Crown Prosecution Service in our area to better support, listen to and understand victims. I will support her in this work and provide additional investment to ensure that all victims of these crimes are supported. This investment would go to, among other areas, funding Independent Sexual Violence Advisers to support victims through their court cases.



Improve support for people in mental health crisis

Mental health was a factor in 30% of all incidents attended by the police in Avon and Somerset in 2020. The police have become the service of first resort in many cases, but this is often inappropriate for the vulnerable people involved. There are now mental health practitioners in the police control room to advise officers, but I will continue to work with NHS Mental Health Commissioners to ensure that vulnerable people get the right support and understanding from the right professionals at the right time, before their mental health becomes a crisis.



4. POLICING DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

The COVID-19 pandemic has been an extremely challenging period for everyone, including the police, who have had to enforce lockdown restrictions which have changed dozens of times, in addition to their 'business as usual' roles. All the while, they risk catching the virus and taking it home to their families. Over the last year, I have heard many personal stories from key workers and police officers. They, as well as NHS and other emergency service staff deserve our respect for the way they have continued supporting the public throughout the pandemic.

Since March 2020, Avon and Somerset Police has adopted a proportionate response approach to applying COVID-19 regulations based on the nationally agreed principles of 'Engage, Explain, Encourage and then Enforce'. As the pandemic has developed, Avon and Somerset Police has increasingly targeted more serious offenders, especially those organising illegal raves, and has handed out significant fines including several £10,000 fines to event organisers. During summer 2020, Avon and Somerset closed or disrupted 25 illegal raves and took direct enforcement action including seizure of equipment and arrests.

In November 2020, the Police and Crime Commissioner surveyed local residents about the police's approach to enforcing the restrictions locally. Whilst a majority backed the police's approach, a significant minority wanted greater enforcement and the police have listened. I am pleased that Avon and Somerset Police has played such a key role in supporting the response to this health emergency whilst maintaining public confidence – the latest results of our local survey recorded public confidence in the police at the highest levels since 2015.



5. POLICE WELFARE

The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted more than ever the importance of the work our police, other emergency services, the NHS and other key workers do in often difficult circumstances to protect us all, and they too deserve protection and support while they do this challenging work. However, there has sadly been a significant increase in assaults on police officers and staff throughout the pandemic – there were over a thousand assaults on police officers and staff in 2020 in Avon and Somerset alone. Every weekend, police officers are punched, kicked, scratched, spat and coughed at while doing their job. This is unacceptable. I have made three actions a priority in my role as Deputy Police and Crime Commissioner and I will continue these if elected:

1. Supporting initiatives led by the Chief Constable to introduce a 7 Point Promise to enhance the support for all staff and officers affected by assault and to ensure that Courts must consider every police assault and see Body Worn Video evidence;
2. Working with the Chief Constable to ensure that officers have the right equipment to protect themselves; and
3. Supporting plans to increase the robustness of sentencing guidelines for assaults on police.

Officer numbers reduced from approximately 3,300 in 2010 to just over 2,500 in 2018. Given the reduction in police funding and officer numbers since 2010 as a result of austerity and central Government budget cuts, officers remain under pressure across Avon and Somerset. Even with the additional funding for new officers that has been promised by Government, it will take many years to recruit and train these officers to fill the gaps. This has been exacerbated by the Police and Crime Panel's decision to veto the council tax precept. These funding challenges have brought significant additional pressure on existing officers, meaning that clear and demonstrable action to protect police welfare is extremely important. I pledge to provide this action if elected.



6. POLICE FUNDING AND OFFICER NUMBERS

Overall police funding

One of the responsibilities of Police and Crime Commissioners is to set their police force's total budget and determine the level of the council tax precept that helps pay for this budget. Nationally, police force budgets are paid for in part by central Government funding and in part through local council tax. Avon and Somerset Police's annual budget is just over £340 million, and in 2010, central Government provided almost 70% of this budget, with just over 30% being paid for by council tax.

However, by 2020, the portion of the budget paid for by central Government had been cut to 60%, meaning that 40% of the budget had to be paid for through the council tax precept to ensure that essential police services were maintained. Overall, central Government funding has been cut by almost one third between 2010 and 2018, representing a huge challenge for Avon and Somerset, and other police forces.

As a result of these central Government funding cuts, police officer numbers in Avon and Somerset fell from 3,300 in 2010 to a low point of just over 2,500 in 2018.

In 2017, increasingly alarmed at the impact of these cuts on the local police service, particularly in combination with the increasing complexity of crimes being committed, the independent Police and Crime Commissioner, Sue Mountstevens, and the Chief Constable of Avon and Somerset Police wrote an open letter to the Minister for Policing enclosing a report entitled '*Tipping Point*'. This report made clear the impact that the funding cuts were having and warned of serious consequences if additional investment was not provided.

Following this lobbying of the Government from 2018 onwards, Police and Crime Commissioners were able to make above inflation increases in the council tax precept to fund local police forces. This allowed police budgets to not just keep pace with costs that were rising because of inflation, but also to plug the gap left by falling central Government funding for the police.

Central Government froze the Government portion of police funding for the 2021/22 budget, again effectively delivering a real term cut in police funding when you take projected inflation into account. To allow Police and Crime Commissioners to once again cover this funding gap, they were allowed to raise council tax precept by up to £15 per household. For Avon and Somerset Police, this would equate to £1.30 per month per household over the year, or a 6.8% increase in council tax across the Avon and Somerset police force area.

This was a challenging decision for the Police and Crime Commissioner to make especially given the impact on household budgets of the pandemic, but based on an extensive public consultation and the need to invest to ensure the delivery of the uplift in officers the PCC was not willing to pay the price of central Government funding cuts with public safety, and so recommended the full increase allowed by the Government. However, the Police and Crime Panel for the area insisted that the precept level was lowered – the only Police and Crime Panel not to follow the PCC's recommendation in the country despite Avon and Somerset having the lowest funding per head of



population in any area containing one of the 9 Core Cities. The Panel did finally support a precept increase of 5.8%, which will at least cover the cost of inflation on the whole police budget.

This 2021/22 budget will mean that Avon and Somerset residents are contributing 41% of the total police budget, with central Government funding being cut to 59%, from almost 70% 10 years ago.

You can read *The Tipping Point* report here:

<https://www.avonandsomerset.police.uk/media/29964806/safe-sustainable-policing-report.pdf>

Additional funding for more police officers

In 2019, central Government announced new, ringfenced funding for an additional 20,000 police officers nationally called Operation Uplift. The funding for Operation Uplift is spread over 3 years starting in financial year 2020/21 and ending in 2022/23. This funding can only be used for the recruitment of new police officers and cannot be used to make up the shortfall in overall police budgets created by the ongoing central Government funding cuts.

Following the delivery of the first year of Operation Uplift funding, central Government has now reduced the Uplift target for 2021/22 by 2,000 new officers nationally, saying that instead it intends to make that number up in the final year of Operation Uplift in 2022/23. This change in the profile of the Operation Uplift funding has not yet been confirmed.

New police officers take 3 years to be fully qualified under the Police Constable Degree Apprenticeship scheme. By March 2026 on current projections, Avon and Somerset Police will have fully trained officer numbers at levels similar to those seen in 2010. However, police officers leave at a rate of approximately 200 per year so over the period Avon and Somerset will need to recruit in excess of 1,000 police officers to meet the target. I am pleased to say that they are currently on track to do so, and if elected, I will continue to lobby central Government for the Operation Uplift funding to be protected and delivered in full by the end of the 2022/23 financial year.

You can read the Police Foundation Report on police funding and officer numbers here:

<http://www.police-foundation.org.uk/2020/02/a-question-of-fairness-examining-the-force-level-relationship-between-police-officer-numbers-and-the-20000-uplift/>



7. LOCAL LEADERSHIP

The PCC role is about more than just policing. Many of the problems the police deal with need many local organisations to tackle them, and I know from experience that the best Police and Crime Commissioners can bring together local services to best serve local people. This has been very challenging in an era of funding cuts, but if elected I will lobby central Government to replace the lost investment and challenge partners to ensure they work together effectively. I have a proven track record of bringing organisations from across Avon and Somerset together, such as:

- I have set up 5 joint teams comprising police, local authorities, schools and health colleagues from across Avon and Somerset to focus on reducing knife crime amongst young people;
- I have worked with local NHS groups to address important shared problems such as domestic abuse, mental health and sexual violence; and
- I led the team which jointly commissioned a service to identify and protect victims of child sexual exploitation across our area.

If elected, I will continue to use my experience to show leadership and challenge local partners and political parties to work together to address these issues.



8. FURTHER PRIORITIES

Police accountability

Police have important powers, which they need to keep us safe, but they must also accept responsibility for exercising them. The tragic death of George Floyd while in police custody in the United States of America shows what can go wrong when police misuse their powers. I will continue using and developing existing accountability and transparency mechanisms, including scrutiny panels, so that local people can review police use of force, stop and search, and feedback their views to officers. This will ultimately help improve police accountability across Avon and Somerset.

Sustainability

Climate change is a real and pressing issue, and the police force can and should ensure they are responding to this challenge in whatever ways they can. I will bring forward existing plans to introduce electric vehicles into the Avon and Somerset Police fleet and to obtain more energy from renewable sources.

Policing protest

There has been a string of high profile local protests in Avon and Somerset throughout 2020 and early 2021. For example, the Black Lives Matter protest in summer 2020 or the anti-lockdown protest in November 2020. The police have a duty to uphold lawful protest which they rightly take extremely seriously. This responsibility must also be balanced against their other duties including to uphold the law and keep the public safe. This tension has been more apparent than usual during the pandemic. It is important that the police are transparent and objective in their plans to enable protests and treat all potential protests in the same way regardless of the cause involved.

Young people

The pandemic has been especially tough on young people, some of whom may be in abusive homes, unable to attend school or to socialise with their peers. The lack of online access in some homes has also exacerbated inequality. It is important that the police listen to young people and address issues that matter to them. I will work with existing groups such as the Youth Parliament to make sure that young people's voices are heard and where appropriate acted on by the police.

Criminal Justice System funding cuts

The UK has one of the best Criminal Justice Systems in the world but a decade of austerity and cuts from central Government have put it under severe strain. This has been particularly highlighted during the pandemic. Local people are not well served under the current system and I will lobby central Government to replace the lost investment in the Criminal Justice System, and work with partners to ensure they work together effectively whilst respecting judicial and prosecutorial independence.



9. HOW TO VOTE FOR YOUR POLICE AND CRIME COMMISSIONER

How to vote

The Police and Crime Commissioner elections are due to take place nationally on 6th May 2021. These elections have been rescheduled from 7th May 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

You must be registered to vote and at least 18 years of age. To register to vote, please see here:

<https://www.gov.uk/register-to-vote>

The Police and Crime Commissioner elections use the Supplementary Vote system which means you get 2 choices. This is different from local and general elections, which use the First Past the Post system. For more information on the Supplementary Vote system, please see here:

<https://www.electoralcommission.org.uk/i-am-a/voter/types-elections/police-and-crime-commissioners>

You can vote for your Police and Crime Commissioner in the usual way either by post or by attending your local polling station. To register for a postal vote, please contact your local council.

About Police and Crime Commissioners

There is one Police and Crime Commissioner for each police force area. London, the City of London and Manchester are managed using a different system. Avon and Somerset consists of 4 unitary authorities – Bath and North East Somerset, Bristol, North Somerset and South Gloucestershire – and the County of Somerset. As well as the Police and Crime Commissioner elections, there are Mayoral and Councillor elections taking place in Bristol, the Mayor of the West of England Combined Authority election and potentially also County Council elections in Somerset on the same day.

For more details and information about the role of the Police and Crime Commissioner, please visit the Association of Police and Crime Commissioners website: <https://www.apccs.police.uk/role-of-the-pcc/>

All Police and Crime Commissioners are required to swear an Oath of Impartiality when they take office. This sets out a commitment to undertake the role with integrity and to treat all local residents with impartiality.

The full Police and Crime Commissioner oath is as follows:

"{Full Name} of {Place} do solemnly and sincerely promise that I will serve all the people of Police Force Area in the office of police and crime commissioner without fear or favour.

I will act with integrity and diligence in my role and, to the best of my ability, will execute the duties of my office to ensure that the police are able to cut crime and protect the public.

Vote for John Smith on 6 May

Avon & Somerset's independent candidate for Police and Crime Commissioner

Keeping the party politics out of policing



I will give a voice to the public, especially victims of crime and work with other services to ensure the safety of the community and effective criminal justice.

I will take all steps within my power to ensure transparency of my decisions, so that I may be properly held to account by the public.

I will not seek to influence or prevent any lawful and reasonable investigation or arrest, nor encourage any police action save that which is lawful and justified within the bounds of this office."

For more information about what Police and Crime Commissioners do, please visit my website:

<https://johnsmith4pcc.com/what-do-police-and-crime-commissioners-do/>