

Power check

Reviewing the effectiveness of police accountability: insights for the second term

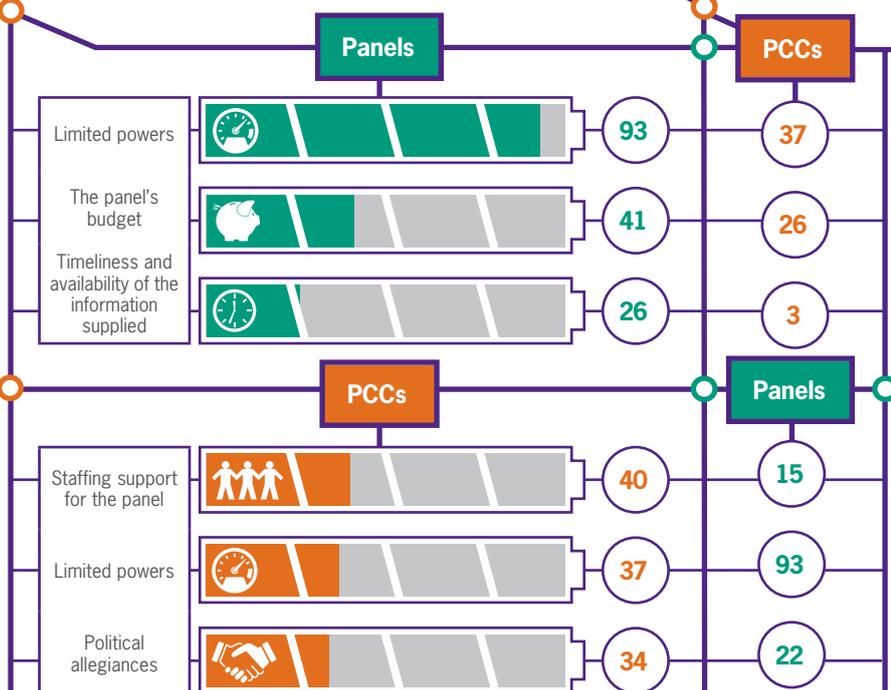
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Police and crime panels (panels) have an important role in challenging and supporting police and crime commissioners (PCCs) on behalf of the public and are the primary ‘check and balance’ on PCCs’ work in between elections. Frontline Consulting and Grant Thornton conducted a first term review of panels, looking at their effectiveness and the strength of their relationships with their PCCs.

PERCEPTIONS OF PANEL EFFECTIVENESS

- 96% of panels felt they were moderately effective, but only 41% considered themselves very effective
- 82% of PCCs felt that panels were effective in challenging and supporting their work
- 51% of PCCs felt panels were usually effective when it came to support, but only 40% felt the same when it came to challenging
- Only half of panels (54%) and PCCs (42%) felt panels got the balance right between challenge and support
- Only 42% of panel members viewed their proactive scrutiny work as being very or extremely successful
- 61% of PCCs said that recommendations or observations from panels had influenced or changed their decision making
- The impact on wider policing is less clear, with only 50% of chief constables saying the work of the panel influenced their work of the work of the force

THE TOP THREE BARRIERS TO EFFECTIVENESS (%)



PERCEPTIONS OF BARRIERS TO EFFECTIVENESS

Panels and PCCs did not agree on the main barriers to effectiveness. While panels had a clear main barrier in ‘limited powers’ PCCs were more diffuse in their responses with no one issue dominating. Equally, areas considered to be the main barriers for one body were considered very minor barriers for the other.

Recommendations for effective working

STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT

- Perceptions over the balance of challenge and support:** Panels should gauge PCC perceptions of the balance of their work periodically, and use that to inform self-assessments of their effectiveness throughout their term.
- Enhanced profile:** Panels should use 'soft' influence to enhance their effectiveness and develop a common focus. This should underpin a communications strategy aimed at building a public profile.
- Networking:** Panels should engage with other panels and scrutiny bodies to keep abreast of emerging good practice and use this to inform their scrutiny and enhance their effectiveness. Panels should also forge relationships with other panels where devolution proposals, collaboration initiatives or strategic alliances mean partnership working forms an increasingly important part of the PCC's role.
- Ensuring a range of skills, knowledge and experience:** Panels should be clear about the purpose of their work and how they are going to achieve that purpose. They should undertake a short skills audit to identify gaps across the membership and seek to ensure a range of skills, knowledge and experience among panel members.

WORK STREAM PLANNING

- Structured work programme of proactive scrutiny:** Panels should maintain a structured work programme of proactive scrutiny that they can communicate with their members, the PCC/OPCC and the public. This should be supplemented by less-planned proactive scrutiny in response to current issues during the PCC's term and relating to the PCC's activities.
- Briefings by the OPCC and PCC on their work:** Panels should request briefings from the OPCC and PCC on the PCC's work. This should inform panel planning and preparation for effective challenge and scrutiny sessions.
- Co-planning with the OPCC:** Panels should pursue co-ordinated work planning with the OPCC.
- Liaison officer in the OPCC:** Panels should request a dedicated link or liaison officer in the OPCC to engage with the panel.

MEMBER DEVELOPMENT

- Training needs, including complaints-handling training:** Panels should consider their training needs, request support for such training, and make time to attend.
- Induction training for all members:** Panel chairs should ensure all new members receive induction training.
- Having champions for different issues within the panel:** Panels should consider identifying and appointing champions to focus on different themes to improve the overall effectiveness of scrutiny and increase panel capacity to cover the PCC's priority areas in the police and crime plan.

About Grant Thornton

Grant Thornton has a well-established market in the public sector having worked with local authorities for over 30 years. The police sector is a chosen area of investment for the firm. As the largest external auditor of police bodies in England and Wales, we have the technical and operational expertise, relationships and sector specialisms required to deliver innovative solutions and market insights. Our services include value-added assurance, internal audit services, advice on governance and development of major change diagnostics.

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About Frontline Consulting

Frontline Consulting works especially with councillors, police and crime panels, and non-executive members in their partnership roles across the public sector – working with the education, health, housing, police and voluntary sectors, commissioners and providers.

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