

Kent and Medway Police and Crime Panel Annual Report 2017

Introduction

1. This report summarises the work of the Panel during 2017. It follows annual reports that have been produced every year since the Panel was established in November 2012.

Meetings

2. During the year the Panel met 5 times and the Complaints Sub-Panel met once. The Chairman also met with the Commissioner to assist and support the smooth running of Panel business.
3. An informal briefing for Panel members with the Chief Constable took place in October, at which the Chief Constable explained the new policing model and other work of the Force and engaged in discussion with Panel members about policing in Kent and Medway. The Commissioner was present and Panel members found this to be a very useful meeting and it is scheduled to be repeated in 2018.
4. Panel members also met informally to review their effectiveness and to consider ideas for ways of doing business in the future.

Panel business

5. The Panel met its statutory duty in February to consider and make recommendations on the Commissioner's draft "Safer in Kent: The Community Safety and Justice Plan 2017-21" (the name the Commissioner gave to his Police and Crime Plan) and his proposed budget and precept. The Panel supported the Plan and asked that the wording be amended to make clear his ownership of the plan. The Commissioner subsequently made the change recommended by the Panel.
6. The Panel unanimously approved the Commissioner's proposed 3.3% precept increase, noting that this proposal had received general support in the Commissioner's consultation exercise. The Panel noted that this increased precept would enable the Chief Constable to increase the number officers by about 80 and to maintain the number of PCSO's at the current level. The Panel sought and received an assurance that the planned use of £5.1m reserves would be replenished if underspending arose but noted the intention to reduce reserves to around £20m by 2021/22.
7. The Panel met its statutory duty to consider the Commissioner's Annual Report for 2016/7. The Panel subsequently noted the Commissioner's accounts for 2016/17.
8. The Commissioner has placed a strong emphasis on mental health in his plan and the Panel received updates on his work at every meeting except one.

9. The Panel received 2 reports from the Commissioner on the establishment of a volunteer Police Cadet Scheme and were pleased to note that it is now operating in parts of Kent with an intention to expand.
10. The Panel were disappointed to see the HMIC report on Crime Recording accuracy which rated the Force as "Required Improvement" - a decline from its previous high standard - and asked for a report from the Commissioner. The Panel noted the actions the Force had taken to improve the accuracy of crime recording and the steps the Commissioner was taking to exercise oversight of the Force's actions. The Panel asked for a further report once HMICFRS have re-inspected.
11. By contrast the Panel asked for a report on the HMIC report on Vulnerability and was pleased to note the improved assessment of "Good" by HMIC.
12. The Commissioner's Plan placed emphasis on continued public engagement and also on developing opportunities for the future so the Panel asked for progress reports on both these items during the year. The Panel was pleased to note the Commissioner's continued high level of public engagement and also that many of the ideas for the future were being actively pursued.
13. New legislation gave opportunities for Police and Crime Commissioners to take an increased role in the governance of the Fire and Rescue Service. The Commissioner reported to the Panel that he had decided to opt for taking a seat on the Kent and Medway Towns Fire and Rescue Authority, but that a minor change to legislation was necessary before he could become a voting member. In the meantime the Commissioner reported that he was attending meetings of that Authority. The Panel was supportive of the decision to adopt this role rather than any of the other options permitted by legislation.
14. The Panel was also given a detailed update on the Government proposals to give Police and Crime Commissioners an enhanced role in the police complaints process. The Commissioner advised the Panel that the proposals had yet to be translated into legislation and that, although he had been given a report setting out the business case for each option he did not intend to make a decision until Government plans became clearer, The Panel noted this position.
15. "Questions to the Commissioner" continued as a regular item at each meeting. The Panel welcomed the Commissioner's willingness to answer questions, of which he had been given prior notice. The agenda item continues to provide a greater opportunity for Panel members to raise issues with the Commissioner that do not form part of his formal reports.

Complaints

16. The Panel received a report on complaints against the Commissioner and noted that, as in every previous year, the number of complaints was very low. The Panel noted that one had been partially upheld and that the Commissioner had taken the action recommended by the Panel in response to the complaint.

Commissioner's decisions

17. The Commissioner met his responsibility to inform the Panel of decisions of significant public interest at each meeting. The Commissioner provided the Panel with a clear statement of the business case and reasons for his decisions which the Panel found very helpful. The Commissioner also published details on his website of expenditure in excess of £500 and continued to provide reports to the Panel drawing attention to some of these items and their significance. The Panel asked, and the Commissioner agreed, that his report should include items suggested by Panel officers.

Regional and National Contacts

18. During the year the Vice-Chair and officers continued to attend meetings of the Eastern Regional Network of Panel Members and officers to exchange views and ideas of Panel activity and ways of operating. There were suggestions from several Panels that there would be benefit in establishing a national association of Police and Crime Panels to provide a national voice alongside similar ones for Police and Crime Commissioners and Police and Crime Commissioners' Chief Executives. The Panel did not favour such an association and suggested that a "Special Interest Group" of the Local Government Association might be a more straightforward way of establishing a national voice for Panels. This suggestion received widespread support from other Panels and the Group is expected to be formed in 2018.

Panel terms of reference

19. The Panel's terms of reference require them to be reviewed annually. It is considered convenient to do this at the same time as the Panel reviews its work over the past year. No changes to the terms of reference are proposed at this time. The full terms of reference can be found by following this [link](#).

Panel membership

20. Following District and County Council elections in June 2017, Panel membership was reviewed to ensure geographic and political balance as required by legislation. As a result, a seat was given to the Conservative Group (KCC).

Panel budget

21. The Panel's terms of reference also require the Panel to review its budget on an annual basis. Finance for the Panel's work comes from an annual Home Office grant which has been constant at £63,340 since the Panel was established and is likely to be the same in 2018/19. In 2014/15, expenditure was £30,344; in 2015/16 it was £30,859, and in 2016/17 it was £29,730. Expenditure consists of reimbursement of Members' expenses and the cost of administrative and policy support to the Panel. It estimated that the outturn for 2017/18 will be similar - approximately half of the grant. The Panel can therefore be assured that its costs are contained well within the money provided by the Home Office.

Conclusions

22. This year the Panel's relationship with the Commissioner, elected in May 2016 has continued to develop. As a result of his Safer in Kent Plan, members now have a detailed document against which to review and report on delivery of his vision for policing and criminal justice in the coming years. The Panel is pleased that he continues to engage constructively at meetings and that he is content for Panel members to enhance their understanding of policing by informal engagement with the Chief Constable.

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