

KENT AND MEDWAY POLICE AND CRIME PANEL

MINUTES of a meeting of the Kent and Medway Police and Crime Panel held in the Online on Thursday, 4 February 2021.

PRESENT: Mr P M Hill, OBE (Chairman), Mr Gurvinder Sandher (Vice-Chairman), Cllr L Dyball (Substitute for Cllr P Fleming), Cllr P Feacey, Mrs L Game, Cllr F Gooch, Ms S Hamilton, Cllr Mrs J Hollingsbee, Cllr S Mochrie-Cox, Cllr R Palmer, Cllr M Rhodes, Cllr H Tejan, Cllr R Wells, Cllr G Hackwell, Mrs E Bolton and Cllr J Burden

ALSO PRESENT: Mr M Scott (Kent Police and Crime Commissioner), Mr A Harper (PCC's Chief Executive) and Mr Robert Phillips (PCC's Chief Finance Officer)

IN ATTENDANCE: Mr J Cook (Democratic Services Manager), Mrs A Taylor (Scrutiny Research Officer) and Mr M Dentten (Democratic Services Officer)

UNRESTRICTED ITEMS

368. Declarations of Interests by Members in Items on the Agenda for this Meeting *(Item 3)*

No declarations were made.

369. Minutes of the Police and Crime Panel held on 8 December 2020 *(Item 4)*

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting held on 8 December 2020 were a correct record and that they be signed by the Chairman.

370. Draft Safer in Kent Plan & Precept Proposal 2021/22 *(Item A1)*

1. The Chairman introduced the item, the intention to scrutinise the proposed draft policing plan and to consider the need for the additional requested precept funds was made. It was confirmed that consideration of the Plan and Precept would be conducted in parts.

Policing Plan

2. The Commissioner provided a verbal overview of the draft Safer in Kent Plan. He informed the Panel that policing through the pandemic had been the overall focus in the past year. It was noted that the October 2020 HMICFRS Covid-19 Inspection of Kent Police was not yet publicly available, initial feedback had cited the force as 'exemplary and high-quality'.
3. The past year's crime trends and developments were detailed by the Commissioner. He confirmed that the total number of crimes had decreased

by 18,000, the impact of the pandemic was acknowledged, though it was stated that it was not the only reason for the reduction. The Commissioner informed Members that the number of county lines in Kent had reduced from 90 to 59 and that two districts had been free of county lines for a period of at least three months. He added that town centre policing teams had become well established and dealt successfully with crime, antisocial behaviour (ASB) and cooperated with local charities. The Commissioner also advised of the newly formed Problem Solving Taskforce consisting of 24 PCSOs tackling persistent crime and ASB and that the road policing team had been expanded and rebranded as the road safety team to better reflect its work. In the Force Control Room, he reported that over 99% of 999 calls had been answered, with an average wait time under 10 seconds and that 101 call attrition had reduced from over 25% in his first year in office to less than 10% with an average wait time of less than 90 seconds. Concerns were raised by the Commissioner regarding the backlog and pace of cases progressing in the courts system.

4. A verbal summary of the Policing Survey responses was provided by the Commissioner. He reminded the Panel that the survey had run for a shorter time than in previous years and had been available in an online format only, which had impacted the volume of responses. It was noted that there had been a decrease in the number of respondents who reported having been a victim of crime, a marginal drop in satisfaction with Kent Police, from those who had been victims of crime was also highlighted. The Commissioner stated that there had been little change in the policing priorities given by survey respondents.
5. The grounds for extending the previous policing plan were outlined by the Commissioner. He confirmed that the policing priorities were to remain unchanged due to a continued high level of public support. It was noted that a deviation from the instituted policing priorities could negatively impact service delivery. The Commissioner asserted that the extension of the plan created consistency for Kent Police, given the postponement of the Police and Crime Commissioner election in 2020 and possible delay of the election scheduled for May 2021. He added that a new policing plan could be considered by the Commissioner following the election.
6. Members asked a range of questions in relation to the draft Safer in Kent Plan. Key issues raised by the Panel and responded to by the Commissioner included the following:
 - a. It was asked whether ASB could be separated from other crime types in future surveys, to provide a greater focus and level of information. The Commissioner stated that he was willing to explore making a greater distinction in future surveys. A suggestion was made that crime and ASB be reported to the Panel separately at future meetings.
 - b. The Commissioner was asked how members of BAME communities and urban demographics could be encouraged to respond to future surveys, given the limits of Covid-19 and social restrictions. He

asserted his commitment to increase cooperation and engagement with minority groups after the pandemic and welcomed suggestions from the Panel regarding collaboration with community groups.

- c. Clarification on the definition of antisocial behaviour (ASB) was sought, it was asked how the police could work to make the public feel less ignored, in relation to ASB, and by what means the definition could be disseminated to communities. The Commissioner defined ASB, based on the Anti-social Behaviour, Crime and Policing Act 2014 definition, a) behaviour that is capable of causing nuisance or annoyance to a person in relation to that person's occupation of residential premises and behaviour that has caused, or b) behaviour that is likely to cause, harassment, alarm or distress to any person. He reminded the Panel that tackling ASB was the responsibility of multiple agencies across Kent and relied on public support. The Commissioner reassured Members that he would address their ASB related concerns directly.
- d. A Member raised the low feeling of safety indicated by BAME survey respondents and asked the Commissioner what had been done to analyse the cause of the trend. The Commissioner responded that due to the low number of responses it was difficult to recognise a significant trend.
- e. The Commissioner was asked whether non-online methods of distributing surveys had been considered and what had been done to accommodate older people. The Commissioner recognised the practical challenges presented by Covid-19 social restrictions and cited examples of older people engaging with online platforms.
- f. It was requested that the Commissioner confirm what had been done to work with other mental health service providers and to keep the Panel informed on the date and roll out of mental health hub trials. The Commissioner recognised that mental health remained a policing demand and that collaboration with the Crisis Care Board and Safe Havens had sought to alleviate issues.

Precept

7. The Commissioner introduced the precept proposal and thanked his staff and the Chief Finance Officer in particular for their excellent work, in view of the extraordinary operational and budgetary pressures over the past year.
8. The Commissioner confirmed his proposed precept increase, as an increase for the year of £15 (7.4%) for Council Tax band D, it was noted that a limit of £15 for precept increases had been set by the Home Office. He added that over 75% of respondents to the Annual Policing Survey gave their support for an increase to the precept of £15.
9. The proposed service developments enabled by an increase in the precept were detailed by the Commissioner and included: a £5.3m investment in

equipment and technology; the reestablishment of a Schools Unit; an expansion of the Vulnerabilities Investigation Unit, to tackle domestic abuse, stalking and sexual violence; the establishment of a crime academy tasked with improving investigation and the expansion of teams countering organised crime and county lines. It was acknowledged that the precept increase would also alleviate significant cost pressures.

10. Financial pressures were separated by the Commissioner into Covid and non-Covid categories. He reminded the Panel that Kent Police had to claim Covid-19 related expenses from government in arrears, 80% of costs had been reimbursed at the time of the meeting. Confirmation was given that the only direct Covid-19 grant funding received from government had been for PPE. The Commissioner acknowledged a £6m cost pressure, which had resulted from officers delaying retirement during the pandemic, it was confirmed that the precept increase would cover the pressure.
11. Addressing savings, the Commissioner gave reassurance that future efficiency programmes would analyse savings without reducing officer or front-line staff numbers. He added that Kent Police's continued membership of the Seven Force Strategic Collaboration (7F) had continued to deliver savings.
12. Members asked a range of questions in relation to the 2021/22 Precept Proposal. Key issues raised by the Panel and responded to by the Commissioner included the following:
 - a. It was asked how savings analysis would be conducted, if qualitative data would be considered and whether the precept increase was good value. The Commissioner reassured the Panel that qualitative data would be considered when analysing possible savings. He asserted that the expansion of services justified the precept increase and reinforced the continued uplift programme from central government.
 - b. The Commissioner was asked to clarify whether an increase in police officer numbers would come from the precept increase or central government funding. He informed Members that central government provided the funding for a further increase in officer numbers.
 - c. When asked whether an increase in the officer retirement rate after the pandemic had been predicted, given the lower level throughout the pandemic, the Commissioner confirmed that reinvestment had been planned in the event of a change in retirement rates.
 - d. A Member asked what level of savings had been made as a result of the change in working arrangements for back office staff during the pandemic. The Commissioner confirmed that whilst there had been little opportunity to reduce overtime accounting for the force's extra ordinary pressures, savings had been made and were accounted for in the report.

- e. The Commissioner was asked on what grounds a predicted decrease in the size of the Council Tax base had been determined. He asserted that the possible delayed impact of the pandemic on the jobs market had been considered a risk to the size of the tax base. Mr Phillips, Chief Finance Officer, added that a significant increase in the number of residents claiming Council Tax support would likely decrease Kent's overall tax base in the coming year.
- f. In relation to the Schools Unit, the Commissioner was asked to detail the size and timeline of the rollout. He confirmed that the team would initially number 25 officers, to be expanded to 70 officers in total. It was noted that the team would largely focus on secondary schools and would be supported by existing school PCSOs.
- g. The total cost to Kent Police as a result of incidents at Napier Barracks, Folkestone was requested. The Commissioner informed the Panel that the cost to Kent Police had not yet been finalised, though significant additional staffing costs were anticipated. The Commissioner agreed to discuss the cost of policing Napier Barracks with the Home Secretary.
- h. A Member asked the Commissioner whether he thought the precept proposal represented good value for money and what impact savings in back office costs would have on Kent Police. The Commissioner stated that Kent had the 7th lowest financial settlement and 10th lowest precept, per head in the country, which represented below average costs to taxpayers. He added that agreement had been reached with government, that all costs related to EU Exit would be covered centrally.
- i. It was asked how pandemic policing pressures were anticipated and dealt with. The Commissioner confirmed that the enforcement of Covid regulations would continue until the regulations were changed and that the extent of regulations impacted the anticipated pressures.

13. The Commissioner thanked the Panel for their scrutiny of the policing plan and precept proposal.

14. Members voted on the precept. The proposed precept increase was agreed.

RESOLVED that the Proposed Plan, Precept and Budget be approved.

371. Mental Health - verbal update

(Item B1)

- 1. The Commissioner began his verbal update with an overview of national mental health developments. He reminded Members that the results of the inquiry he had launched to explore the impact of Covid on policing in terms of mental health demand had been published and was circulated to the Panel on 21 January. It was noted that the results had indicated no consistent findings or themes, which confirmed that the impact of the pandemic on police had

been varied. The Commissioner added that in his capacity as the Association of Police and Crime Commissioners' National Lead for Mental Health, he had briefed the Minister for Mental Health on the findings and noted their support. Confirmation was given that further research, into the impact of Covid related mental health demand, had been commissioned. The panel were informed that the Government had launched its consultation White Paper on reforming the Mental Health Act, the Commissioner outlined his role in providing recommendations.

2. Addressing local developments, the Commissioner noted that the Mental Health Crisis Care Board had last met in October 2020 and that due to significant pressures on the NHS, the February meeting had been cancelled. Regarding Kent's 4 Safe Havens, the Commissioner confirmed that he had met with the Kent Community Foundation, Hestia and community partners for a service update, recent attendance had been disappointing, though the impact of restrictions was acknowledged.
3. The Chairman asked whether the low level of Safe Haven use had increased the burden on police in Kent. The Commissioner confirmed that the demand on police resulting from mental health issues and incidents had remained consistent over the past year, whilst the number of Section 136 detentions had decreased.

RESOLVED that the verbal update be noted.

372. Questions to the Commissioner

(Item D1)

Question 1:

Section 61 of the Criminal Justice and Public Order Act 1994 gives the police extensive powers to remove two or more trespassers residing on land where they have been asked to leave and where there is reasonable belief that damage has been committed or threats and abuse offered or there are six or more vehicles. Will the Police and Crime Commissioner call the Chief Constable to account for failure to apply these powers particularly having regard to the costs running into tens of thousands of pounds that District Councils are incurring in terms of clear ups and legal costs, the fact that the land is harmed and local people are denied the amenity of this land where it has been designated for public use and lawful sports and pastimes?

(Ashley Clark – Canterbury City Council)

Due to technical difficulties the Member was unable to participate in this part of the meeting; the Commissioner advised that he was still content to answer the question and invited the Member to make contact outside the meeting if he so wished to facilitate further discussion. He confirmed that at a meeting of Kent Leaders a memorandum of understanding had been drafted and agreed regarding inter-authority cooperation. No concerns were raised on the state of relationships between local authorities.

Question 2:

Can the Commissioner please indicate where the enforcement of illegal drug use sits within his priorities for local policing?

(Mark Rhodes – Tonbridge and Malling Borough Council)

The Commissioner reassured the Panel that a robust approach was taken in tackling both illegal drug use and distribution. He asserted that tackling drug related crime wherever it takes place remained a priority. The work of the Operation Eminent team was highlighted. Related statistics for the past year were shared and included: 3,685 arrests; 511 warrants; 3,421 drug seizures and 1,825 weapon seizures.

Question 3:

In the last year, Covid-19 has had a significant impact on the delivery of support and diversion activities funded through the PCC's Safer Community Partnership grant. This has further highlighted a challenge that pre-existed the pandemic. The charities and activities the Maidstone CSP seeks to support, often highlight that the delivery of initiatives within a single financial year can be restrictive and does not allow for services to embed themselves within the borough. For example they may build a relationship with a school but would need to withdraw if they can't secure longer term funding. The same issues have been noted in funding opportunities provided by the Kent Violence Reduction Unit. Covid-19 has only exacerbated this as it has restricted access and has extended processes. Has consideration been given to providing funding that spans more than one financial year in order to support the implementation of more sustainable initiatives?

(Fay Gooch – Maidstone Borough Council)

The Commissioner paid tribute to the Community Safety Partnerships (CSPs) across Kent. He reminded the Panel that through his Crime Reduction Grants, CSPs, local authorities, charities, support services and the Kent Criminal Justice Board had received funding. It was confirmed that the grant operated on a yearly basis, due to its reliance on central government funding settlements.

Question 4:

Can the Commissioner update the Panel on any concerns he has regarding the impact Brexit arrangements have had on Kent Police generally, and in particular whether this has impacted on the Police's capacity to maintain core policing services. If he does have concerns, could the Commissioner explain to the Panel what actions he is taking to require or support the Chief Constable in addressing these concerns?

(Mike Hill – Kent County Council)

The Commissioner confirmed that he had received weekly briefings from the Chief Constable on EU Exit. He noted that the Chief Constable had not expressed any significant concerns, though the pressure caused from the management of lorry drivers entering Kent without negative Covid-19 tests

was acknowledged. The Commissioner added that the Kent Resilience Forum continued to monitor developments from a multi-agency perspective.

Question 5:

As Road Safety fits within the priorities for Kent Police in the Commissioner's Safer in Kent Plan, can the Commissioner please update the Panel on what actions he is taking to support effective enforcement in this area, particularly in relation to rural areas where challenges to enforcement have often been cited as barriers to speed limit changes, speech-check cameras and related initiatives?

(Sarah Hamilton – Tunbridge Wells Borough Council)

The Commissioner confirmed that road policing, including enforcement, remained a priority. He acknowledged that enforcement in rural areas was limited by road suitability and safety. Community Safety Units were encouraged to put forward campaigns for his support. The rural operations of the Road Safety Unit were highlighted, it was noted that road policing often prevented other forms of crime.

RESOLVED that the answers provided by the Commissioner be noted.

373. Panel Annual Report - 2020/21

(Item E1)

1. The Commissioner gave his thanks to the Panel members, its officers and the officers within his office for their work over the past year. A tribute was made to Kent Police officers, staff and volunteers for their work, dedication and sacrifice.

RESOLVED that the report be approved.

374. Panel Work Programme

(Item E2)

1. The Chairman reminded the Panel that the Work Programme covered the duration of the Commissioner's term in office.

RESOLVED that the work programme be noted.

375. To note 2021/2022 Kent and Medway Police and Crime Panel meeting dates

(Item E3)

1. The Chairman noted that no further meetings were scheduled before the May 2021, Police and Crime Commissioner election.

RESOLVED that the future meeting dates be noted.