

KENT COUNTY COUNCIL

KENT AND MEDWAY POLICE AND CRIME PANEL

MINUTES of a meeting of the Kent and Medway Police and Crime Panel held in the Council Chamber, Sessions House, Maidstone on Wednesday, 2 February 2022.

PRESENT: Mr P M Hill, OBE (Chairman), Mr Gurvinder Sandher (Vice-Chairman), Cllr L Dyball, Cllr G Hackwell, Cllr Mrs J Hollingsbee, Mr M A J Hood, Cllr D Keers, Cllr S Mochrie-Cox, Cllr R Palmer, Cllr H Tejan and Cllr R Wells

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

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

IN VIRTUAL ATTENDANCE: Mr I Chittenden, Cllr J Purle and Cllr O Richardson

UNRESTRICTED ITEMS

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

No declarations were made.

34. Minutes of the Police and Crime Panel held on 8 December 2021 (Item 4)

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting held on 8 December 2021 were an accurate record and that they be signed by the Chairman.

35. Draft April 2022 to March 2025 Police and Crime Plan 'Making Kent Safer' and Precept Proposal for 2022/23 (Item B1)

1. The Chair introduced the item and set out the intention to scrutinise the draft Police and Crime Plan and Precept Proposal in two separate parts.

Police and Crime Plan

2. The Commissioner provided a verbal overview of the draft 'Making Kent Safer' Police and Crime Plan, which included his seven priorities for Kent Police over the next three years. He paid tribute to his staff for their support developing the plan and facilitating public consultation. The Panel were reminded that Police and Crime Plans were a statutory requirement under the Police Reform and Social Responsibility Act 2011. Regarding the public consultation carried out in advance of the Plan's formulation, the Commissioner informed Members that residents and local business owners were asked for their policing priorities and issues of strategic importance. It was noted that the consultation survey ran simultaneously with the Violence against Women and Girls survey. He

confirmed that sexual offences were highlighted by the public as a key priority and stressed the need to tackle the issue. In addition to online responses, which formed the majority of responses, he affirmed that consultation at Police open days and community group meetings had taken place. Concerning delivery, he confirmed that the Chief Constable had been consulted and endorsed the Plan. The Plan's seven priorities were detailed: working with residents, communities and businesses to fight crime and antisocial behaviour; tackling violence against women and girls; protecting people from exploitation and abuse; combating organised crime and county lines; being visible and responsive to the needs of communities; preventing road danger and supporting Vision Zero; and protecting young people and providing opportunities. He emphasised that the priorities were of equal importance.

3. The Commissioner compared the proposed priorities with those of his previous 'Safer in Kent' Plan. The importance of supporting businesses as well as residents was stressed. He verified that tackling violence against women and girls would be its own priority for the first time, having previously formed part of other priorities. In relation to combatting organised crime and county lines, he recognised that whilst the number of county lines gangs operating in Kent had halved, there was further work required. He confirmed that road safety was another new priority and reflected his commitment to support Kent County Council's Vision Zero Road Safety Strategy. The importance of protecting young people, especially from Domestic Abuse, and providing them with opportunities was highlighted, with the work of the Police cadets and mini-cadets programmes mentioned as part of the continued commitment.
4. Members asked a range of questions in relation to the draft Police and Crime Plan. Key issues raised by the Panel and responded to by the Commissioner included the following:
 - a. In relation to crime escalation, a Member asked that anti-social behaviour be tackled in order to prevent future serious crime and threats to community safety. The Commissioner acknowledged the issue and stressed that tackling crime was important regardless of its severity. He recognised the impact of anti-social behaviour on communities and reminded Members that it was an issue requiring a multi-agency response.
 - b. The Commissioner was asked to incorporate a greater focus on crime prevention into his Plan, in order to mitigate against future crime and its impact on community safety.
 - c. A Member asked the Commissioner to increase his efforts to engage with young people, when considering the low level of responses to the consultation survey, 6.7% of all responses. The Commissioner recognised that the issue had been a persistent challenge and committed to expand the use social media for youth engagement purposes.

- d. Members asked that a paragraph be added to the Plan committing to combat hate crime towards people with protected characteristics. Members discussed key hate crime themes and trends in Kent.
- e. A Member asked whether, as part of his commitment to road safety, the Commissioner would ensure that 20mph zones were effectively enforced. The Commissioner noted his support for 20mph zones and set out his expectation that all speed limits were equally and fairly enforced.
- f. The Commissioner's commitment to support businesses was commended by a Member, who encouraged him to collaborate with them further on community safety issues.
- g. In relation to the public consultation, a Member asked if future surveys could be distributed to young people through schools, in order to increase their input. The Commissioner agreed to work with local authorities and schools to further engage with school age children.
- h. The Chair asked what had been done to ensure that speeding in rural areas was tackled and that residents were made aware of Police countermeasures. The Commissioner reassured Members that he had continued to hold the Chief to account on the issue and that his road safety priority would further enhance accountability.
- i. Concerning recent increases in fraud, the Chair asked whether the Commissioner had ensured the appropriate resourcing of Kent Police's counter-fraud capabilities. The Commissioner confirmed that a joint counter-fraud team was funded with Essex Police and reflected what was a national issue. He commented that he had not been satisfied with Action Fraud's outcomes to date.

Precept Proposal

- 5. The Commissioner introduced the precept proposal and thanked his Chief Finance Officer in particular for his excellent work in facilitating the proposal and budget. He summarised the financial challenges faced by Kent Police throughout his term in office, noted that more than £100m savings had been made in that time and reminded Members that previous precept increases had contributed towards an increase in officer numbers, prior to the police uplift programme. He maintained that Kent had one of the lowest government and council tax funded police forces in UK. It was noted that staff costs comprised 83% of the draft revenue budget. Cost pressures linked to Kent's strategic location between London and Europe and the export of crime were highlighted. He recognised the continued financial challenge of Covid-19 and that not all costs related to the pandemic had been covered by government grants. Additional cost pressures related to staff pay awards; National Insurance contribution increases; and rising energy cost were detailed. The Commissioner set out his plan to make £6.8m savings in 2022/23 and made a commitment to consider staff savings as a last resort in the medium term. The importance of utilising Kent Police's purchasing power and assets effectively in

order to maintain a lean budget was acknowledged. Concerning the Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner, he reassured Members that it had operated with the same annual budget since 2016, representing an inflationary decrease in funding. In relation to the capital budget, he drew attention to planned estate investment, which included improvements to multiple police stations across the county. Regarding future commissioning, he confirmed that a digital asset management system would be procured to allow members of the public to upload digital evidence.

6. The Commissioner confirmed his proposed precept increase, an increase for the year of £10 (4.58%) for Council Tax band D. It was noted that a limit of £10 for precept increases had been set by the Home Office. Under the proposal a Band D property would pay £228.15 a year towards policing.
7. Members asked a range of questions in relation to the Precept Proposal. Key issues raised by the Panel and responded to by the Commissioner included the following:
 - a. Members raised their concerns at the lack of long-term financial sustainability and noted the difficulty of making further savings when only 17% of the revenue budget related to non-staffing costs.
 - b. A Member asked whether the growth in officer numbers as a result of the police uplift programme was expected to have a negative financial impact on Kent Police. The Commissioner confirmed that during the programme the Home Office provided funding for newly recruited officers quarterly, which included a one-off grant exceeding the salary and training costs associated. To mitigate the medium-term financial impact, he stressed the importance of efficiently utilising commercial services and cross-force commissioning.
 - c. Members highlighted the recent cost of living pressures faced by Kent residents, as a result of rising energy and goods prices. They asked the Commissioner whether he'd considered this before formulating his precept proposal. The Commissioner acknowledged the pressures and impact that council tax increases would have on residents, he stressed that he would not have considered a precept increase unless it was vital to the operation of the force, Members were reminded of the significant funding challenges faced.
 - d. In response to a question from a Member on the ways staffing costs could be reduced without impacting existing employees, the Commissioner recognised halting recruitment or leaving positions vacant as two possible options.
 - e. A Member stressed the need to make Government and local MPs aware of the savings made by Kent Police over recent years, the high performance of the force and impact of future reductions in funding. The Commissioner committed to ensure that Kent Police was fairly funded

and highlighted the review of the police funding formula as a key opportunity to influence future funding arrangements.

8. Members voted on the precept. The proposed precept increase was approved by majority vote.

RESOLVED that the Proposed Plan and Precept be approved.

36. Questions to the Commissioner

(Item D1)

Question 1

Can the Commissioner provide the numbers of warranted police officers serving in Kent per 100 thousand of Kent's population on the following dates:

31 December 2009

31 December 2021

(Cllr Richard Palmer, Swale Borough Council)

1. The Commissioner advised that the data he had available from the Office of National Statistics related to March and for some years was based on population estimates. He confirmed police officer strength as of March 2010 was 3787, equating to 221 officers per 100,000 population; March 2016 officer strength fell to 3182, or 175 per 100,000 population; and March 2022 officer strength was 3970, or 213 per 100,000 population. He added that the projection for March 2023, following the completion of the police uplift programme, was 4145 officers or approximately 222 per 100,000 based on the current population estimate.

Question 2

The Commissioner will be aware that Kent is a large and diverse County with many localised needs so does he share and agree with me and will he take steps to ensure Kent Police are resourced and structured to support such true, local and equal partnership working based on that meets these local needs as long as it meets statutory requirements and that strategic direction is set as local as possible by those that are able to set strategic direction rather than a one size fits all and wholly County wide approach.

(Cllr Shane Mochrie-Cox, Gravesham Borough Council)

2. The Commissioner reminded the Panel of his responsibilities for countywide policing priorities and the Chief Constable's role in allocating policing resources appropriately in response to the priorities. He explained the local policing structure on a division and district level. A pledge was made to hold the Chief Constable to account on local performance and outcomes.

RESOLVED that the answers provided by the Commissioner be noted.

37. Panel Annual Report - 2021/22

(Item E1)

RESOLVED that the report be approved.

38. Future work programme

(Item E2)

RESOLVED that the work programme be noted.

39. Date of next programmed meeting - 16 June 2022

(Item F1)

RESOLVED that the future meeting date be noted.