

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, County Hall, Maidstone on Tuesday, 16 July 2024.

PRESENT: Mr P M Hill, OBE (Chairman), Mr G Sandher (Vice-Chairman), Cllr M Blakemore, Cllr P Cole, Cllr P Feacey, Cllr S Mochrie-Cox, Cllr R Palmer, Cllr R Wells, Mrs E Bolton, Mr I S Chittenden, Cllr Mrs J Hollingsbee and Mr J Meade
Mr G Sandher MBE, Cllr M Blakemore, Mrs E Bolton, Mr I Chittenden, Cllr P Cole, Cllr P Feacey, Cllr Mrs J Hollingsbee, Mr J Meade, Cllr S Mochrie-Cox, Cllr R Palmer and Cllr R Wells.

ALSO PRESENT: and Mr R Phillips (PCC's Chief Finance Officer).

IN ATTENDANCE: (Research Officer – Overview and Scrutiny).

UNRESTRICTED ITEMS

115. Election of Chair

(Item 2)

1. The Scrutiny Research Officer asked for nominations for Chair of the Kent and Medway Police and Crime Panel.

2. Mr Meade proposed, and Cllr Feacey seconded, that Mr Hill be elected Chair of the Kent and Medway Police and Crime Panel. No other nominations were received.

RESOLVED that Mr Hill be elected Chair of the Kent and Medway Police and Crime Panel.

116. Election of Vice-Chair

(Item 3)

1. The Chair proposed, and Mrs Bolton seconded, that Mr Sandher be elected Vice-Chair of the Kent and Medway Police and Crime Panel. No other nominations were received.

RESOLVED that Mr Sandher be elected Vice-Chair of the Kent and Medway Police and Crime Panel.

117. Apologies and Substitutes

(Item 4)

1. The Scrutiny Research Officer outlined the following changes to the membership of the Kent and Medway Police and Crime Panel:

- Cllr Eddie Peake had replaced Cllr Lauren Edwards as the representative of Medway Council.

-Cllr Astra Birch had replaced Cllr Nancy Warne as the representative of Tunbridge Wells Borough Council.

-Cllr Stuart Jeffery had replaced Cllr Parfitt-Read as the representative of Maidstone Borough Council.

-Cllr Pat Makinson no longer represented Thanet District Council. A replacement would be notified from Thanet District Council.

2. Apologies were received from:

-Cllr Connie Nolan

-Cllr Charlotte Zosseder

-Cllr Astra Birch

-Cllr Eddie Peake.

118. Declarations of Interests by Members in Items on the Agenda for this Meeting (Item 5)

1. Mr Feacey declared that he was Chairman of Ashford Volunteer Centre.

119. Minutes of the Police and Crime Panel held on 6 February 2024 (Item 6)

1. The Chair informed the Panel that, following the letter that the Panel sent to the former Minister of State for Crime, Policing and Fire (The Rt Hon Chris Philp MP) about the need to review the funding formula for police forces across England and Wales, he had received a reply from the Minister confirming that the Government was working to introduce new funding arrangements.
2. The Chair proposed that a similar letter be sent to the current Home Secretary (The Rt Hon Yvette Cooper MP) and the current Chancellor of the Exchequer (The Rt Hon Rachel Reeves MP) to reiterate the need to review the funding formula for police forces across England and Wales, and secure a continuing commitment from the new Government. Mr Palmer seconded the proposal.
3. A Member suggested that the draft letter be circulated to all the Members of the Panel so that they could provide feedback and comments before it was sent. The Panel agreed.

RESOLVED: that the minutes of the meeting held on 6 February 2024 were an accurate record. That a letter that reiterated the need to review the funding formula for police forces across England and Wales be sent from the Panel to the current Home Secretary and Chancellor of Exchequer.

120. Neighbourhood Policing Review - update report

(Item B1)

1. The Commissioner introduced the report and explained that the Review itself was first commissioned in February 2022 with the objective of improving the Force's neighbourhood policing while, at the same time, accruing savings. This would have an impact on over 30 roles, with about 500 people affected - including officers, staff as well as managers. There was extensive engagement within the Force in order to understand people's challenges, and research was carried out to analyse the neighbourhood models of other police forces. The Commissioner explained that he wanted to make sure that the offer to the public was as good as, if not better, than the previous arrangement.
2. The Commissioner referred to the model in the update report, which indicated the number of police officers and staff in this new structure. This included: 'Beat Officers' who had geographical personal ownership of Wards; the Child Centred Policing team and; Neighbourhood Taskforces. The rural policing team saw a very small uplift of 1 PS and 6.5 PCSOs. The work of the PCSOs focused particularly on engagement and crime prevention, which had been well received by the rural community.
3. In terms of implementation, the model was mostly on track, with 84% of Beat Officers, 80% of the Child Centred Policing team and 100% of the Neighbourhood Taskforce's in place. All but one of the Rural uplift posts were also delivered. It was anticipated that the model itself would be completed by September 2024, and recruitment of PCSOs was ongoing in order to support that.
4. The Commissioner was pleased to have received both written and anecdotal positive feedback from members of the community about the impact the individual officers were having in their communities. He also paid tribute to the Special Constabulary, as they had been very proactive in supporting the Neighbourhood Policing Model.
5. The Chairman commented that he had received very good feedback from the local residents of his Division. He asked how the Neighbourhood Taskforces fitted into the geographical and managerial structure.
 - a. The Commissioner replied that the Taskforces were based in each Kent District, and each District Chief Inspector would be responsible for the deployment of their own Taskforce. The approach was to focus on each issue and to engage with local residents and business in order to address it. This method had been piloted previously and had a positive impact.
6. In answer to a question about how to make sure that the model was not centralised and responded to local need, the Commissioner explained that the work of Beat Officers was focused on local problem solving and that they should not be moved around from teams outside of their district. They were not part of central Partnerships teams, which was where more centrally-based command and control would take place. The schools' teams and the Rural

team were more centrally based because they were better able to coordinate their activity, nonetheless the emphasis was on local problem solving with local analysis - a demand-led model.

7. In response to a question about how he viewed the role of the Kent's Special Constabulary, the Commissioner said that one of the positive things about volunteering in Kent was that it was seen as complementary and not a replacement, and that they added significant value to the service delivered.
 - a. Kent's Special Constables were very highly regarded and were encouraged to develop professionally. They were offered courses, such as public order and advance driving courses, and were all equipped with Taser - which not many police forces were willing to do.
 - b. The Commissioner said that he was determined to help increase the number of Special Constables in Kent. He had a meeting with the Minister of State for Crime, Policing and Fire, the College of Policing and the NSPCC around making the national approach around the Special Constabulary more consistent in terms of rank structure, tasks and responsibilities.
8. In reply to a question about the importance of ensuring local officer presence in this policing model, the Commissioner explained that the extraction of Beat Officers would only be considered in exceptional circumstances.
9. A Member of the Panel asked how the Commissioner was going to hold the Chief Constable to account to ensure that the Neighbourhood Policing model worked across all of the Force's priorities, especially in areas such as violence against women and children, and county lines.
 - a. The Commissioner explained that he had been reassured by the Strategic Partnerships command that, while district-controlled Beat Officers would deal with local issues, they would also still implement the Force's priorities - including tackling violence against women and girls.
10. In response to a question about how representative the Neighbourhood Policing model was in terms of the communities that the police officers and staff were serving, the Commissioner said that he would gather this information and provide it to the Panel.
11. A Panel Member wondered whether the three-day training provided to officers and staff in the newly created posts of the Neighbourhood Policing model would be sufficient.
 - a. The Commissioner replied that all officers received a basic three-day training to be equipped with problem-solving skills. Other training was available. For example, a number of the PCSOs had gained a formal Level 3 qualification in problem solving. There were also regular training sessions with partner organisations on other issues as well as regular refresher sessions.

12. In response to a question about whether the £1.5m funding for the Anti-social Behaviour Hotspot Response programme had been effective at tackling crime in town centres, the Commissioner said that there were 25 hotspot areas within the county which had been identified on that basis.
13. In order to assess the effects of this programme, 75,000 surveys had been delivered to those living in the hotspot areas to gather their feedback. Early responses could be available in October 2024.

RESOLVED: To **note** the report and **agree** to a further update at the December 2024 meeting.

121. Criminal Justice System - update report

(Item B2)

1. The Commissioner paid tribute to all members of staff and officers who worked hard in the Criminal Justice System to support victims and witnesses. He clarified that the report and the concerns that it raised were not a negative reflection on them.
2. He also reported that he had received positive feedback on the effectiveness of the Kent Criminal Justice Board, that he chaired.
3. In terms of the reasons behind the significant backlog in court caseload, he explained that, as a result of the impact and disruptions caused by the Pandemic, the caseload had more than doubled since then.
4. In terms of staffing levels, there was a shortage of both judges and legal advisers. If more judges and legal advisers were recruited, then the total court caseload would decrease.
5. In terms of work entering the system, with an increase in police officer numbers, more people were being charged by Kent Police. This had resulted in more cases progressing to the Crown Prosecution Service and to the courts. In addition, there had recently been a number of cases involving protesters and small boat crossings, which added to the workload. In short, there was a triple challenge involving the work entering the system, courts' capacity and staffing levels.
6. The Commissioner said that he was going to write to the new Government to reiterate those challenges, and work in partnership with the Government in order to address some of them - as the impact on victims, witnesses, defendants and staff was significant.
7. In reply to a question about the possibility of using other venues to reduce the backlog, the Commissioner said that some work was already transferred elsewhere, for example the small boats' cases were heard in Sussex. The main challenge was the shortage of staff; judges' careers had to be made more attractive in order to encourage more people to apply. Many Kent-based staff opted to work in London to receive the London Allowance. The PCC had recommended that a Southeast Allowance be paid in order to break the cycle

of failed recruitment campaigns and staff shortages. However, with no funding available, this recommendation did not materialise.

8. A concern was raised about the increasing trend in the centralisation of courts. The Commissioner recognised that centralisation had the effect of disempowering teams locally. He added that, in order to increase the number of court cases heard, he believed that the use of the virtual video element was an effective solution. The South-East video enabled justice programme, which the Government funded and was coordinated by Kent and Sussex Police, showed positive outcomes and saved valuable police officers' time. However, the funding for that programme ended and the judiciary opposed its use.
9. In reply to a question about how Kent's backlog compared statistically with similar counties, Mr Harper said that this was a regional issue involving all the counties bordering London. He added that all the relevant agencies, including the judiciary, the courts, the police and the Probation Service were doing everything in their power to address the backlog issue.
10. A Panel Member asked whether there was anything that could be done differently. The Commissioner replied that some elements of the process could be made more efficient and effective for victims, witnesses and defendants. This included making sure that offenders were sanctioned - which was important - but also promoting rehabilitation or other kinds of support to deal with the underlying problems.
11. The Chairman proposed to receive more regular updates on this important issue, before the planned update in June 2025. It was agreed that the Commissioner would provide a verbal update on the Criminal Justice System at the Panel's meeting on 18 December 2024 prior to the report update in June 2025.

RESOLVED: To **note** the report and **agree** to a further verbal update at the December meeting, prior the planned update at the June 2025 meeting.

122. Shoplifting - update report *(Item B3)*

1. The Commissioner introduced the report and explained that shoplifting was an important issue and was one of the priorities in his Police and Crime Plan. Shoplifting had also become more prominent in the national agenda because it caused significant challenges.
2. The Commissioner said that he had met regularly with representatives of the Association of Convenience Stores, who estimated that there were 5.6 million incidents of shoplifting in the whole country every year. He stated that, in Kent, shoplifting accounted for more than the total amount of victim-based crime in the county. Also, the extent of this problem in Kent (15,137 recorded crimes between April 2023 and March 2024) could be even greater as not all shoplifting crimes were reported.
3. Recent developments included the launch, in October 2023, of the Retail Crime Action Plan. The Plan provided greater assurance around attendance at the

scene, investigation, dealing with prolific offenders and patrolling. In addition, with the 'Pegasus' initiative, which was launched in Sussex, retailers were funding analytical and operational work at national level to provide intelligence packages for policing on cross-border organised crime.

4. A key issue which was reported by local businesses to the Commissioner was around the online reporting of crime. While the online reporting system had improved, the mechanism was still too time consuming, as there was no option to set an account and pre-populate details; these had to be entered for every reported incident.
5. When discussing the Retail Crime Action Plan, the Commissioner reported that the Kent Police's Digital Asset Management System now enabled efficient, quick time uploading of CCTV from stores. If the image was suitable, this was uploaded to a localised internal system called "Caught on Camera" where officers could quickly identify suspects. In May 2024, 532 images sent to 'Caught on Camera' were for retail crime and had sufficient facial features to enable a retrospective facial recognition search. 186 (35%) of them enabled officers to identify a suspect.
6. With regard to hotspot patrolling, positive results had been shown in West Kent. Increased patrols in retail areas which were experiencing particular problems had resulted in a reduction by half in the number of reports of shoplifting from those locations.
7. In answer to a question about the location of these hotspot areas, the Commissioner said that these comprised mainly large retail areas, such as supermarkets and shopping centres. However, he cautioned that the identification of these hotspots was very much dependent on whether shoplifting crimes were reported.
8. In reply to a question about whether a permit was required in order to supplement Kent Police in tackling retail crime, the Commissioner clarified that investigations could only be conducted by warrant card-holding police officers. However, Kent Police did work in partnership with street marshals and security guards, and some of them were given dedicated training from the Force.

RESOLVED: To **note** the report.

123. Decision OPCC D.035.24 - Chief Executive's Notice of Intention to Retire
(Item C1)

1. The Commissioner praised the PCC's Chief Executive and Monitoring Officer's professionalism, hard work and diligence. The Chief Executive, who had over 40 years of policing experience, was going to be a real loss to the Commissioner's team. The Commissioner expressed gratitude to him for everything he had done for his team and the county.
2. The Chairman also expressed his gratitude to the PCC's Chief Executive and Monitoring Officer, and advised that there would be a Confirmation Hearing for the recruitment of the new PCC's Chief Executive and Monitoring Officer in due course.

RESOLVED: To note the decision and that a Confirmation Hearing would take place later in the year.

124. Questions to the Commissioner

(Item D1)

Question 1

On your re-election (for which, congratulations) you promised that later this year you will introduce an immediate justice programme, designed to bring those responsible to justice more quickly. Could you tell us please how those committing antisocial behaviour will be made to provide payback to our neighbourhoods and what form that payback will take?

(Cllr Mike Blakemore, Folkestone and Hythe District Council)

1. The Commissioner stated that his Office (the Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner) had been in contact with a number of organisations to scope their ability to deliver an immediate justice programme. The expectation was that referrals would be made within 48 hours. The form that payback would take had to be properly monitored from a safeguarding perspective. The Commissioner anticipated that the programme could include graffiti removal and litter-picking. There would also be an element of reform.

Question 2

Many areas in Kent face a woeful police presence and one such area is the Isle of Sheppey within the Borough of Swale. Sheppey faces unique issues with its poor road's infrastructure particularly the A249 and the New Sheppey bridge which frequently faces closure. Sheppey residents are concerned about the rise in crime, and they have real concerns about poor police response times. This is a common theme across Kent in many communities but owing to the unique nature of Sheppey it is far worse.

Sheppey doesn't have an operational police station and often police response must be dispatched from crews from the mainland such as from Sittingbourne, Medway or further afield. The lack of local police available on the Island at times is very concerning, how is the Police & Crime Commissioner (PCC) holding to account the Chief Constable to ensure the residents receive adequate local policing on Sheppey?

(Cllr Richard Palmer, Swale Borough Council)

1. The Commissioner explained that he had regular conversations with Kent Police about the Isle of Sheppey because he recognised its unique geography and the challenges that its residents faced. The Island would be allocated an additional Neighbourhood Officer (from 4 to 5) as part of the Neighbourhood Policing Model. He advised the Island had an operational police station which Local Policing Team officers worked from, and support was also provided by the Rural Policing Team and the Roads Policing Team. He said Kent Police would always respond to emergencies, like anywhere else in the county. He added Sheerness was receiving hotspot patrols to target serious violence and

anti-social behaviour, and the Island would also receive additional roads policing as part of an operation to tackle violent criminals. He reminded Members and the public to sign up to My Community Voice in order to receive regular updates from their local Beat Officer..

Question 3

The Police and Crime Commissioner is known to support that the police should have all the tools at their disposal to help combat crime, such as when tasers were supported, and this is welcomed. In light of this support for said tools and in line with holding the Chief Constable to account for direction of said resources, what can be done to ensure that said resources both human and technological can be dedicated and expanded so that every area has access and constant use of such regular preventative and detective methods, such as the drones used in Op Gurkha? While these are felt to be resource intensive, they deliver great results for local communities suffering from ASB such as bike crimes and have been proven to work by capturing evidence.

(Cllr Shane Mochrie-Cox, Gravesham Borough Council)

1. The Commissioner explained that, as part of his rural Safer Streets programme, there would be a further investment in drone capability and training for officers, as well as more resource-intensive days of action to tackle offroad motorbikes. In addition, the targeting of anti-social behaviour in rural communities would be carried out more extensively. Actions to tackle anti-social behaviour, fly tipping, illegal offroad motorcycling and rural burglary would all be part of this programme.

RESOLVED: To **note** the responses to the questions.

125. Annual Report of the Police and Crime Panel

(Item E1)

RESOLVED: to **consider** and **approve** the Kent and Medway Police and Crime Panel 2023/24 Annual Report

126. Future work programme

(Item E2)

RESOLVED to **note** the report.

127. Minutes of the Commissioner's Governance Board meetings held on 13 September 2023, 29 November 2023 and 28 February 2024

(Item F1)

RESOLVED: that the minutes of the Performance and Delivery Board meetings held on 13 September 2023, 29 November 2023 and 28 February 2024 **be noted**.