

## 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 Wednesday, 18 December 2024.

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

ALSO PRESENT: Mr M Scott (Kent Police and Crime Commissioner), Mr D Paul (PCC's Chief Executive ) and Mr N Wickens (Head of Policy Coordination & Research, OPCC).

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

### UNRESTRICTED ITEMS

#### 1. Apologies and Substitutes

*(Item 2)*

1. Apologies were received from Cllr Astra Birch, Mr Ian Chittenden, Mrs Jenny Hollingsbee, Cllr Stuart Jeffery, Cllr Des Keers, Cllr Teresa Murray, Cllr Eddie Peake and Cllr Charlotte Zosseder. Mr Richard Streatfeild substituted for Mr Ian Chittenden, and Cllr Matt Boughton substituted for Cllr Des Keers.

#### 2. Declarations of Interest by Members in Items on the Agenda for this Meeting

*(Item 3)*

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

#### 3. Minutes of the Police and Crime Panel held on 10 October 2024

*(Item 4)*

RESOLVED: that the minutes of the meeting held on 10 October 2024 were an accurate record.

#### 4. Neighbourhood Policing Review - Update

*(Item B1)*

1. The Kent Police and Crime Commissioner introduced the report and said that the Kent Police's Neighbourhood Policing (NHP) Model was launched in June 2023 and consisted of:
  - Beat Officers
  - Neighbourhood Taskforces (NTF)
  - Child-Centred Policing Teams (CCPTs) and

- Strategic Prevention Command (including a Prevention Hub and the Rural Task Force).
- 2. The Model was a substantial change for the force and was based on the rationale of boosting visibility and cutting crime in local communities while making financial savings.
- 3. The Model was based on meeting need and demand in local communities; over 200 Police Officers were posted into local neighbourhoods, with the allocation of other resources determined by local Chief Inspectors. Every Kent District now had its own task force.
- 4. Other developments included increasing the size of the Rural Task Force (RTF) by adding PCSOs, and a centralised anti-social behaviour hub. The rollout of the NHP Model was nearly complete; there were still a few PCSO posts that needed to be filled.
- 5. In terms of the benefits that had been realised through the NHP Model, the volume of engagement with communities had risen dramatically. Between July and October 2024, neighbourhood officers recorded attendance at:
  - 703 engagement events
  - 672 meetings
  - 144 surgeries
  - 792 school or youth visits and
  - 92 Parish Council meetings.
- 6. In addition, with support from the Office of the Kent Police and Crime Commissioner (OPCC), the force had been allocated £1.5million from the Home Office Hotspot Response Fund to combat ASB and serious violence.
- 7. In answer to a question about how the Government's requirement to recruit more neighbourhood police officers would affect Kent's NHP Model, the Commissioner said he was awaiting the precise allocation, but based on the funding formula, he estimated an allocation of about £2.5million, which equated to about 30 to 35 officers or PCSOs. He also highlighted that the Government commitment would require the force to move officers and Special Constables into NHP roles.
- 8. In reply to a question about how the £7.1million savings from the implementation of the NHP Model had been realised, the Commissioner explained this was primarily through a reduction in PCSO numbers.
- 9. A Panel member asked a question about how the force tackled anti-social behaviour in town centres.
  - a. The Commissioner replied that there was a problem-solving plan in place to address those issues which was based on additional patrol visibility and the power to use dispersal orders.

10. A Panel member paid tribute to the Gravesend Safe and Free Environment (G SAFE) partnership for their outstanding work on tackling theft, violence and anti-social behaviour in the local community.

11. The Commissioner reported that, in the last quarter, there had been an increase of 3.3% in shoplifting offences compared to the same period in 2023. However, in the same period, 250 more suspects were interviewed, equating to a 22% increase, and 24% more people were charged. There was also a 41% increase in out-of-court disposals.

RESOLVED: To **note** the contents of the report and **require** a further update in Autumn 2025.

## **5. Divisional Policing Review** (Item B2)

1. The Commissioner explained that the review was developed to help improve Kent Police's front line capacity and capability, enhance the quality of investigations and provide an improved service to victims of crime. The Review brought together several projects and initiatives from across the force into one programme of activity in order to make best use of resources, manage risks, and develop benefits in a co-ordinated and structured approach.
2. The programme commenced in March 2023 and had been subject to extensive planning through the Force Change Team working with Chief Officers, the wider workforce and other key stakeholders.
3. The main changes under this model included:
  - Creating larger and more resilient teams that retained a focus on domestic abuse and violence against women and girls (VAWG) investigations, with detective oversight.
  - Combining Crime Squad and County Lines and Gangs Teams and moving under local Divisional ownership into new Proactive CID Teams to remove working barriers and improve local proactive capability.
  - Combining Rape Investigation Teams with High-Risk Domestic Abuse and Stalking Teams, as specialist serious sexual offence investigations required consistency and improvement in line with national best practice.
4. In reply to a question, the Commissioner said that, in this model, the number of detectives within the force would be increased.

A Panel member asked whether the force was still supporting Ask for Angela – a national scheme that helped anyone who was feeling vulnerable on a night out to receive the support they needed. The Commissioner confirmed the force was still supporting Ask for Angela and work was underway to ensure standards were being maintained.

RESOLVED: To **note** the report.

## **6. Road Safety - Update**

*(Item B3)*

1. The Commissioner said that deaths and serious injuries on the roads were tragic and often avoidable events that had significant and life-long impact on the individuals, their families and the local community. Preventing road danger and supporting Vision Zero was one of the priorities in his Making Kent Safer Plan.
2. While it was encouraging that the number of road deaths had gradually decreased since 2021, the achievement of Vision Zero was still a long-term ambition.
3. The Commissioner was pleased that the Kent and Medway Safer Roads Partnership (KMSRP), which he chaired, had senior officer and Elected Member representation from organisations including Kent Police, KCC, Medway Council, Kent Fire and Rescue Service and National Highways.
4. The Kent Police teams specifically tasked with road safety were:
  - The Roads Policing Unit (RPU), with 42 specialist officers who worked a 24/7 shift pattern and were trained in Advanced Driving and Tactical Pursuit and Containment.
  - The Road Safety Unit, with 8 officers trained to examine commercial vehicles.
  - The Camera Safety Team, with 6 members of staff who worked a flexible shift pattern to provide mobile and static speed enforcement across the county
  - A Serious Collision Investigation Unit, with 20 officers who investigated fatal or life changing collisions.
  - The Special Constabulary RPU, with 20 volunteer officers who were trained to the same standard as regular RPU officers and who used the same vehicles to respond to calls and promote road safety.
5. In terms of enforcement activity (including Fixed Penalty Notices, Traffic Offence Reports, summons and arrests), between October 2023 and October 2024, Kent Police dealt with:
  - over 72 ,000 people for excess speed;
  - about 1,700 people for driving while using a mobile phone;
  - about 2 ,180 people for not wearing a seatbelt; and
  - Over 2,000 people for driving whilst unfit due to alcohol or drugs.
6. With regard to Operation Voice – which involved RPU officers targeting high-risk domestic abuse perpetrators who regularly use motor vehicles, with the objective of minimising the risk they pose to their victims and other road users - this year, a total of 47 vehicles were stopped; 5 people were arrested for impairment offences and one person for domestic abuse-related matters. 53 Traffic Offence Reports were issued for road safety-related offences, and 3 drivers were reported for summons.
7. The Commissioner paid tribute to Community Speedwatch (CSW) - a road safety initiative coordinated by Kent Police and run by local communities with the aim of reducing deaths and injuries on Kent's roads. Over the past year, CSW had sent

12,708 warning notices to speeding drivers. 136 drivers were visited at their homes by Police Officers for education purposes, and a further 143 drivers were reported to the DVLA for tax offences. Of note, 93% of drivers that received either a warning notice or a home visit had not been observed speeding again.

8. The road safety charity Brake had received about £40k funding from the PCC each year to support road victims. Brake provided a free, professional support service for road victims who had suffered a bereavement and/or physical injuries. To ensure that road victims and their families were able to access appropriate support, the OPCC had collaborated with Brake and Kent Police to change the referral mechanism to an opt-out process. This had resulted in a greater number of referrals, from 25 in the year preceding the introduction of the opt-out process, to 120 in 2023/24.
9. In reply to a question about the issue of those parking their motor vehicles on pavements and forcing pedestrians onto the road, the Commissioner said there were innovative solutions, such as the creation of bespoke pavement bays in London that enabled a vehicle to park with two wheels on the pavement whilst allowing enough space for pedestrians. Appreciating the problem it caused, the Commissioner advised to flag it to the local Beat Officers.

RESOLVED: To **note** the report.

## **7. Verbal Update from the Commissioner** (Item C1)

1. With regard to the Rural Crime Board, the Commissioner reported that there had been investigative work around fly tipping, which was one of the key issues that residents had identified. The data on the number of incidents by Kent District would help to identify hotspots.
2. In relation to the Criminal Justice System, the total caseload had risen a further 14% compared to the pre-pandemic baseline of February 2020. Nationally, the increase was 9% over the same period. However, the total caseload was starting to level off for the following reasons: activity entering the system had stabilised as new force recruits were now in post; court utilisation had increased to 95% in recent months, compared to 74% in 2023 and 75% in 2022; following the early release of some prisoners, the Crown Courts had been able to carry out additional sentencing work; and newly trained legal advisors were now operating in the Magistrates Courts resulting in the number of court sessions increasing.
3. In terms of call handling, in the period November 2023 to October 2024, 99.7% of 999 calls were answered, and the average answer time was 4 seconds compared to 14 seconds the previous year. 96.7% of 101 calls were answered compared to 83% in 2023, and 45% in 2022. The average answer time was 33 seconds compared to 2 minutes 43 seconds the previous year. In the month of October 2024, 95.3% of 999 calls were answered in under 10 seconds, ranking Kent Police second nationally.

RESOLVED: To **note** the verbal update.

## 8. Questions to the Commissioner

*(Item C2)*

- 1. I feel it is necessary to highlight the success we have seen, particularly in the rural villages within Swale and hopefully across Kent, with the allocated officers policing these areas. There has been a vast amount of work done with local schools, Parish Councils, and community groups. There has been a noticeable reduction in anti-social behaviour and petty crime in some areas. With Christmas fast approaching and the current financial difficulties that many people are experiencing, it would be beneficial if our town centres, particularly retailers and entertainment venues, could benefit from also seeing the extra noticeable, visible, and proactive policing.*

*How is the PCC holding the Chief Constable to account to ensure there is adequate policing within our town centres across Kent and Medway during the festive period?*

Cllr Richard Palmer, Swale Borough Council

1. The Commissioner replied that, in addition to the activities that he discussed earlier on in relation to the Neighbourhood Policing Model and to shoplifting, Kent Police would be running the Safer Winter campaign - with officers tackling crime and anti-social behaviour in town centres over the festive period. Over the Christmas period, there would also be more visible patrolling and more resources available, and Special Constables would be volunteering their time in order to support town-centre policing.

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

## 9. Future Work Programme

*(Item D1)*

RESOLVED: To **note** the Future Work Programme and **contact** the Panel Officer with any items that the Panel would like to add to it.

## 10. Minutes of the Commissioner's Governance Board Meeting held on 2 October 2024

*(Item E1)*

RESOLVED: that the minutes of the Performance and Delivery Board meeting held on 2 October 2024 **be noted**.