

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, 16 July 2025.

PRESENT: Mr G Sandher, MBE DL (Chair), Mr J Moreland (Vice-Chair), Cllr A Birch, Mrs E Bolton, Cllr P Cole, Cllr D Croxton, Cllr D Keers, Cllr B Martin, Cllr T Murray, Cllr D Naghi, Cllr C Nolan, Cllr E Peake, Mr H Rayner, Mr P Webb, Cllr R Wells and Cllr L Wright.

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

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

UNRESTRICTED ITEMS

19. Election of Chair

(Item A2)

1. The Panel Clerk asked for nominations for Chair of the Kent and Medway Police and Crime Panel.
2. Cllr Nolan proposed, and Cllr Murray seconded, that Mr Sandher be elected Chair of the Kent and Medway Police and Crime Panel.
3. No other nominations were received.

RESOLVED: That Mr Gurminder Sandher be elected Chair of the Kent and Medway Police and Crime Panel.

20. Election of Vice-Chair

(Item A3)

1. Cllr Peake proposed, and Cllr Nolan seconded, that Mr Moreland be elected Vice-Chair of the Kent and Medway Police and Crime Panel.
2. Cllr Keers proposed, and Cllr Cole seconded, that Mr Rayner be elected Vice-Chair of the Kent and Medway Police and Crime Panel.
3. Voting was carried out, with nine votes in favour of Mr Moreland and four votes in favour of Mr Rayner. There were no abstentions.

RESOLVED: That Mr John Moreland be elected Vice-Chair of the Kent and Medway Police and Crime Panel.

21. Apologies and Substitutes (Item A4)

1. Apologies were received from:

- Cllr Mike Blakemore
- Cllr Peter Feacey
- Cllr Teresa Murray

2. Councillor Martin substituted for Councillor Perkin.

22. Declarations of Interest by Members in Items on the Agenda for this Meeting (Item A5)

1. Mr Moreland declared that he worked in the Criminal Justice System across criminal law courts, family law courts and civil law courts. He said that he was also a Member of the National Law Society's Criminal Law Committee.

23. Minutes of the Police and Crime Panel Meeting held on 4 February 2025 (Item A6)

1. The Panel agreed that the minutes were an accurate record of the previous meeting.

RESOLVED: That the minutes of the meeting held on 4 February 2025 were an accurate record.

24. Criminal Justice System - Update (Item B1)

1. Following a report on the Criminal Justice System (CJS) that was presented at the 16 July 2024 Panel meeting, this report provided an update on the challenges facing the CJS in Kent and the work of partner organisations and the Kent Criminal Justice Board (KCJB) which was chaired by the Police and Crime Commissioner (PCC).
2. Kent's PCC, Mr Matthew Scott, thanked the previous Panel's Chair, Mr Mike Hill, for his excellent chairmanship and long service as Chair of the Panel. He congratulated Mr Sandher and Mr Moreland for their appointments as the Panel's new Chair and Vice-Chair respectively.
3. The Commissioner said that he chaired the Criminal Justice Board, whose membership included: Kent Police, Kent County Council, the Crown Prosecution Service (CPS), the courts, Legal Aid Society and the Defence Community. A key role of the Board was to oversee the CJS and bring partners together to improve performance.

4. The Commissioner explained that Kent experienced one of the highest levels of backlogs in court caseloads in the country. Although there had been a backlog for a long time, it had increased sharply in recent years.
5. There were a number of reasons for this. In recent years policing had put more work into the system. Compared to pre-Pandemic levels, the Police had charged 50% more people, so therefore more work was entering the system. Also, during the Pandemic, Kent's courts were not equipped appropriately for managing social distancing effectively.
6. There was a shortage of judges to hear cases in the Crown Court, as well as a shortage of legal advisors in Magistrates Courts. These problems were putting a significant strain on victims and witnesses, who were having to wait a long time for their cases to be heard. It also put pressure on the staff managing these cases. The Kent Victim and Witness Care Team did an exceptional job supporting victims and keeping them engaged in the CJ system. The Commissioner said that the backlogs in court caseloads was a national issue.
7. A number of measures had been implemented to tackle the backlog. Communication between the CPS and Kent Police during the trial/hearing process had improved; this ensured that queries could be dealt with expeditiously, reducing case delays. From June 2025, live streaming communication between the CPS, Kent Police Criminal Justice Unit (CJU) and VWCU would be rolled out. A number of Legal Advisor trainees were about to start working in the courts in the coming months. It was hoped that, as a result, there would be a reduction in Kent's backlog.
8. Additional activity was taking place in an effort to tackle the backlog. In terms of out-of-court resolutions, there had been a significant increase as there was a need for effective diversion and rehabilitation for first-time offenders. Also, making sure that prisoner transport contractors managed more effectively their capacity and delivered offenders to courts in a timely manner.
9. Two recent initiatives might also help to address this problem. One was the government's announcement of investment in prison places to build more capacity. The other was the Leveson Review (2025), which proposed a number of reforms around diversion and more efficient resolutions.
10. The Chair asked whether the Commissioner foresaw when the backlog would decrease.
 - a. The Commissioner said that, in the short term, the increase in sitting days would help maintain current levels. In the medium to long term, he hoped that the Leveson Review would bring about a caseload reduction in magistrates courts and crown courts.
11. The Vice-Chair said that there was unused capacity at Maidstone Magistrates Court, and asked whether there had been any consideration of expanding use to deal with, for example, remand prisoners for the rest of the week.
 - a. The Commissioner said that he was not aware of unused capacity and offered to look into it.

12. In reply to a question about the backlog volume in Kent's Crown Court, the Commissioner said it was around 2,000 cases.

13. In answer to whether data on the demographics of victims withdrawing from court proceedings due to the extended wait times was collected, the Commissioner confirmed that it was and that those considering withdrawing were engaged with to determine if further support could be provided.

RESOLVED: That the Kent and Medway Police and Crime Panel **note** this report and **agree** to a further update at their 21 July 2026 meeting.

25. Contacting Kent Police *(Item B2)*

1. Following reports presented at the February and October 2023 Panel meetings, this paper provided an update on Kent Police's performance in managing public demand within the Force Control Room (FCR).
2. The Commissioner said that this had been an area of particular concern, and one that had been reported to the Panel regularly over the course of the last three years. This provided a good example of how the Commissioner's scrutiny of Kent Police performance had led to improvement.
3. The Commissioner reported that, in 2022-23, Kent Police's 101 performance was poor. Its call-handling function was one of the worst in the country. The main reason was insufficient capacity in the Force Control Room.
4. A number of measures were put in place to address this problem, including recruiting more staff to work in the Control Room. As a result, over the last couple of years, performance in terms of managing 999 emergency and non-emergency 101 calls had improved significantly, and the number of calls not answered had reduced to very low levels.
5. National comparisons indicated that Kent Police was now performing to a high standard. In terms of 999 call performance, its ranking had improved from 27th to 2nd for average answer time, with calls answered in under 10 seconds improving from 33rd to 2nd.
6. In terms of 101 call performance, in 2024-25, 97% of calls were answered, and the average waiting time was 31 seconds. In contrast, in October 2022, 55% of calls were answered and the average waiting time was 15 minutes and 51 seconds.
7. Digital contact methods had also been promoted in order to help victims engage with Kent Police, and for people to report other matters, for example vehicle collisions and anti-social behaviour. The Commissioner stressed that it was not intended to be a replacement for the 101 non-emergency service.

- a. In answer to a question, the Commissioner clarified that there was no expectation or requirement that residents had to provide digital evidence to the police.
- 8. The Chair asked whether it was possible for the Panel to visit to the Force's Control Room.
 - a. The Commissioner welcomed the request.
- 9. In reply to a question about what measures had been adopted to reduce staff turnover in the Control Room, the Commissioner said that contributing factors were: increased staff engagement, shift pattern reviews, pay reviews, workplace site re-location, improved working environment, technological changes and improvements to working practices.
- 10. A Member asked whether, in addition to figures, evidence of the quality of caller satisfaction was collected.
 - a. The Commissioner said that Kent Police did not routinely collect victim satisfaction surveys, except for three specific crime types: rape, hate crime and domestic abuse. Qualitative evidence was also gathered via the Rapid Video Response Program, where victims opted to speak to a police officer via a video link.
- 11. In response to three operational questions in relation to specific crimes/incidents which had affected Panel Members personally – although neither the Commissioner nor his Office had access to, or held operational policing information - the Commissioner said his Office would engage with Kent Police in order to seek assurance around the action taken.

RESOLVED: That the Kent and Medway Police and Crime Panel **note** the report.

26. Decision OPCC.D.036.25 - Chief Constable Appointment: Retire and Rehire Scheme
(Item C1)

- 1. The Panel noted the Decision.

RESOLVED: That the Kent and Medway Police and Crime Panel note this Decision.

27. Questions to the Commissioner
(Item D1)

Question 1

How widespread across the County are problems with off-road trail bikes, and what can be done about them? They are a real menace to adults and young children walking in the countryside.

(Councillor Connie Nolan, Canterbury City Council)

1. The Commissioner said that this was a matter that he took very seriously. The previous year, 4,900 of such incidents were reported to Kent Police; this was a decrease of 9% on the year before.
2. In terms of how this matter was addressed - as prescribed in the Neighbourhood Policing Model, there were a number of proactive officers in local communities who were able to address these problems. Tactics used included the deployment of both plain-clothed and uniformed officers across the areas of reported activity, the issuing of Community Protection Warnings to owners of off-road vehicles and the use of drones to identify offenders.

Question 2

Against a background of a sharp rise in shoplifting, fraud and sexual offences in Kent¹, unlawfulness is now driving fear into the heart of residents in Kent. The recent attack on restaurant staff in Broadstairs² by out-of-control youths proves the growing view that Kent Police are now out-of-depth and can no longer maintain the Rule of Law.

Despite a majority opinion forming that reporting a crime to Kent Police is not only futile, but a waste of time, it appears that our local police force, duty bound to protect members of the public from crime, are actively pursuing cases that undermine public confidence and trust; the shameful treatment Mr Foulke's had is one such example³.

With Kent Police failing to resolve crime in Kent, it is totally and utterly unacceptable that residents in Kent now face possible police action for expressing their right to free speech. Will Mr Scott confirm that he will commit to ending the continued erosion of free speech in our county and seek to end this 'Orwellian' and dystopian behaviour?

(Mr Maxwell Harrison, Kent County Council)

Question 3

As highlighted in The Spectator, in one of the key areas Kent Police have oversight over, zero culprits across 123 burglaries⁴ were located. Whilst too busy arresting septuagenarians for 'Thought Crimes', and not burglars and thieves, Kent Police continues to fail local jobseekers by taking over 53 days to complete a DBS check.⁵

¹ Simon Finlay, Kent Online (dated 28 May 2025) - <https://www.kentonline.co.uk/kent/news/sexoffences-shoplifting-and-fraud-in-kent-increases-but-324979/>

² Ciaran McGrath, Daily Express (dated 21 June 2025) - <https://www.express.co.uk/news/uk/2071738/broken-britain-scenes-broadstairs-restaurant-kent>

³ Jack Walters, GN News (dated 10 May 2025) - Free speech row: Kent pensioner arrested over 'thought crime' tweet as officers examine 'Brexit books and wife's shopping list

⁴ Douglas Murray, The Spectator (17 May 2025) - <https://www.spectator.co.uk/article/should-you-be-arrested-for-reading-the-spectator/>

⁵ Sean Delaney, Kent Online (16 June 2025) - <https://www.spectator.co.uk/article/should-you-be-arrested-for-reading-the-spectator/>

The new Reform UK administration was overwhelmingly elected back in May to put the best interests of residents first and serve local people. I seriously suggest senior officials at Kent Police start doing the same. Without doubt, Kent is becoming ever increasingly unsafe and unlawful with criminal activity appearing on our doorsteps.⁶

With confidence in our police an all-time low, and priorities politicized by Kent's top chiefs, it is time residents in Kent start getting their value for money. Will Mr Scott confirm that Kent Police will start "Policing our Streets, Not our Tweets" whilst he takes the strongest disciplinary action against those actively pursuing these cases?

(Mr Paul Webb, Kent County Council)

1. As Questions 2 and 3 were similar, the Commissioner was granted permission by the Chair to provide a single response.
2. He clarified that, as the PCC, he had a statutory role in the police complaints process although had no authority over matters of individual police officer conduct - as those matters were dealt by the Kent Police Professional Standards Department.
3. Kent Police's priorities were not political because he, in his role as Police and Crime Commissioner, was the one who set them. He referred to his Police and Crime Plan that had been named 'Cut Crime, Support Victims and Build Trust' because those were precisely the areas he expected Kent Police to focus on.

Question 4

In your new Police and Crime Plan 'Cut Crime, Support Victims, Build Trust', supporting victims is listed as a priority.

With this in mind, please could you set out what policies and procedures are in place in Kent to support potential victims of modern slavery and people trafficking after their referral to the National Referral Mechanism (NRM) - such support including prompt referral by the Police to legal advice, housing assistance and medical & social care, particularly bearing in mind the largest proportion (23%) of those referred to the NRM this quarter were British nationals of which 76% were children.

(Mr John Moreland, Kent County Council)

1. The Commissioner said that he took this issue very seriously. He explained that, in Kent, there were structured multi-agency policies and procedures in place to support potential victims of modern-day slavery and human trafficking – following referral to the NRM. These were designed to ensure that victims received timely and appropriate support in legal, housing, medical and social care matters.
2. This process included first the identification of signs of slavery and human trafficking. Upon identification, a NRM referral was completed and submitted to

⁶ Lauren Abbott, Kent Online (22 June 2025) - <https://www.kentononline.co.uk/kent/news/porch-piratescash-in-as-kent-doorstep-thefts-rise-costi-325874/>

the UK Human trafficking centre within 48 hours. Victims were entitled to a 45-day reflection recovery period. There were single points of contact (SPOCs) and a specific web page which offered resources detailing services and support available to victims.

3. The primary aim of any response involving children was their welfare and safety, and ensuring that the correct safeguarding policies were followed. Children who were victims, or at risk of, significant harm had to be taken into immediate police protection under Section 46 of the Children Act 1989, and had to be immediately referred into social services. Irrespective of crime type, all Kent police officers were trained to consider the accounts and evidence provided by children and vulnerable adults.
4. The Modern Day Slavery Helpline provided police officers with guidance and links to charities that offered support to victims, and also increased their investigative knowledge. Victims were taken to a safe location, often a police station or designated safe house, and kept out of public view. Language line services were available to support communication with non-English speakers. Victims were also referred to legal aid services to help them understand their rights, immigration status and options for compensation or asylum. Legal support was coordinated through the NRM and local safeguarding boards. Social workers assessed ongoing needs and coordinated care plans, especially for children and those with complex trauma.

Question 5

What specific actions and partnerships are currently in place to prevent violence against women and girls? Is there, in particular, any work being done with the British Transport Police on keeping women and girls safe on our public transport networks?

(Councillor Hannah Perkin, Swale Borough Council)

1. The Commissioner said that this was an area that was prioritised in recent years because it remained a national emergency. In February 2025, Kent Police formally launched a vulnerability strategy which identified specific areas to develop in line with the national vulnerability strategy. The Force also supported the national Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG) taskforce through research into predatory sexual offending. The Public Protection Team worked closely with the College of Policing, contributing to the collection of best practice examples to share nationally, including Best Bar None and High Harm Tool.
2. A VAWG project was undertaken at the University of Kent to introduce interactive child exploitation training for investigators. Kent Community Safety Partnership's workshops were underway to promote a better understanding of issues such as victim blaming and rape myths.
3. The British Transport Police (BTP) had also been involved. For example, in June 2025 it collaborated with the Swale Neighbourhood Task Force and Rail Enforcement officers to tackle antisocial behaviour and prevent drugs and weapons being brought into the town centres and the local night-time economy.

RESOLVED: That the Panel **note** the responses to the questions.

28. Annual Report of the Kent and Medway Police and Crime Panel (Item E1)

1. The Panel Clerk presented the report. He said that, between February 2024 and February 2025, the Panel had received a number of reports including updates on:
 - the HMICFRS PEEL Inspection 2023/25
 - the Kent Police Neighbourhood Policing Review
 - the Criminal Justice System update
 - Shoplifting
 - Road Safety and
 - the Divisional Policing Review.
2. The key points from the 2025/26 Budget and Precept Proposal from the Police and Crime Commissioner (PCC) were:
 - A proposed increase in the precept of £14 a year, or 5.5% for a Band D property, equivalent to £1.17 a month, or 3.8p per day.
 - A council tax for an average Band D property of £270.15.
 - An increase in Government funding of £14.1m.
 - A savings gap of £10m.
3. He also reported on other areas, including Commissioner's Decisions, the Panel's budget and terms of reference.

RESOLVED: That the Panel **consider** and **approve** the content of the 2024/25 Annual Report of the Kent and Medway Police and Crime Panel.

29. Work Programme (Item E2)

1. The Chair reminded Panel Members to let the Panel Clerk know if they wished to suggest any items for the work programme.
2. The Panel noted the work programme.

RESOLVED: That the Panel **note** the Work Programme and **contact** the Panel Clerk with any items they would like to add to it.

30. Minutes of the Commissioner's Performance and Delivery Board Meetings held on 11 December 2024 and 19 February 2025 (Item F1)

RESOLVED: That the Panel **note** the minutes of the Commissioner's Performance and Delivery Board meetings held on 11 December 2024 and 19 February 2025.