

KENT COUNTY COUNCIL

KENT AND MEDWAY POLICE AND CRIME PANEL

MINUTES of a meeting of the Kent and Medway Police and Crime Panel held online on Tuesday, 8 December 2020.

PRESENT: Mr P M Hill, OBE (Chairman), Mr Gurvinder Sandher (Vice-Chairman), Mr N J Collor, Cllr L Dyball (Substitute for Cllr P Fleming), Cllr P Feacey, Mrs L Game, 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 M Dentten (Democratic Services Officer) and Mrs A Taylor (Scrutiny Research Officer)

UNRESTRICTED ITEMS

359. Apologies and Substitutes

(Item 2)

Apologies had been received from Cllr Gooch, Cllr Clark and Cllr Dyball was substituting for Cllr Fleming.

360. Minutes of the Police and Crime Panel held on 8 September 2020

(Item 4)

1. A Member requested an update on Safe Haven operations. The Commissioner confirmed that Kent and Medway Clinical Commissioning Group and Mental Health Matters had set up the Safe Havens and were responsible for operations, he agreed to request an update at the next meeting of the Kent Mental Health Crisis Care Concordat.

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

361. Police Officer Recruitment Update

(Item B1)

1. The Commissioner began the Recruitment Update by noting the positive impact the Panel's scrutiny had on increasing Officer diversity. He attested that the increase in Officer numbers had been possible with further financial support from Kent's council taxpayers and central government. The Commissioner gave an overview of the growth in Officer numbers throughout his term in office and confirmed that despite the fulfilment of staffing targets, recruitment would continue.

2. The Commissioner highlighted the operations and impact of the Chief Constable's Crime Squad, which he noted had been council tax funded and had successfully combated burglary and robbery in fulfilment of Kent's Police and Crime Plan. He outlined the impact the council tax and central government funded County lines and gangs Team had in the reduction of county lines operations in Kent. The Commissioner noted that town centre policing had increased, and that Kent Police's Rural Team had doubled in size.
3. Members asked a range of questions in relation to the Police Officer Recruitment Update. Key issues raised by the Panel and responded to by the Commissioner included the following:
 - What were the dropout rates of new Officers during their training and first year, as well as the common themes which had led to dropouts? The Commissioner confirmed that the dropout rate in training groups of 30-40 averaged between 1-2 and that 5% of Officers left Kent Police before achieving independent status. He noted that finances and work life balance were the most common factors in Officers leaving at both stages.
 - What was the overall level of Officer retention during the Commissioner's term in office? The Commissioner informed the Panel that the Office of National Statistics (ONS) published information on a 6 monthly basis which outlined the number of Officers leaving Kent Police. He cited retirement as the greatest overall factor in Officers leaving the force, which had averaged a rate of 18 per month.
 - Were Officers encouraged to progress and develop their careers at Kent Police. The Commissioner affirmed that the force had been proactive in encouraging applications to posts ranging from Sergeant to Chief Superintendent, he noted that recruitment to higher posts was regular and that the diversity of promotions had increased. The Commissioner also highlighted lateral development which had been encouraged and included secondment opportunities for Officers.
 - Whether changes in the profile of new recruits had occurred, including recruits from other lines of work or older age groups. The Commissioner confirmed that a greater number of Officers from the 30-50 age bracket had been recruited and that the range of employment backgrounds had expanded. He noted Kent Police's strong relationship with the military in Kent, which had contributed to recruitment in the cited age bracket.

RESOLVED that the Kent and Medway Police and Crime Panel note the report.

362. Police response to Covid - 19

(Item B2)

1. The Commissioner provided a verbal overview of his written report on Kent Police's response to Covid-19. He began by acknowledging the role many public services across Kent had played in responding to the demands of the pandemic. The Commissioner stated that the force's overall response to changing guidance

had been good and highlighted the role effective communication had played when updating front line Officers.

2. The Commissioner affirmed that a policy of proportionate and reasonable policing had been operated throughout the pandemic. He informed the Panel that Kent Police had used the National Police Chiefs Council's 4 Es (Engage, Explain, Encourage, Enforce) approach when dealing with members of the public. The Commissioner noted that the number of fixed penalty notices issued in relation to pandemic law enforcement had been stable prior to the second national lockdown, though added that the number of fixed penalty notices had doubled during the second lockdown.
3. The impact of the pandemic on Kent Police's staff was addressed by the Commissioner. He notified the Panel that the number of incidents where Officers had been spat at by members of the public had increased. The Commissioner informed the Panel that individuals had received short prison sentences as a result. Staff sickness rates were covered, it was noted that Kent's rate of 2.5-3% during the pandemic compared favourably to a national average of 5.5% and a predicted rate of 15-20%.
4. Recorded crime was addressed by the Commissioner. He confirmed that recorded crime had fallen during the first national lockdown and had since remained at a lower overall rate when compared to the same period in 2019. The Commissioner recognised that increases in Anti-social Behaviour and Domestic Abuse offenses had occurred during the pandemic.
5. The Commissioner explained that the force control room had operated exceptionally. Demand on the service had increased as many members of the public shifted their contact with the Police online, though it was noted that this had the benefit of freeing up 999 and 101 lines.
6. Regarding scrutiny, the Commissioner informed the Panel that Performance and Delivery Boards had continued, in an online format and that they remained open to the public. He confirmed that Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services (HMICFRS) were due to publish a report in early 2021 analysing policing responses to the pandemic, which had involved multiple forces across the country.
7. Members asked a range of questions in relation to the Police response to Covid-19. Key issues raised by the Panel and responded to by the Commissioner included the following:
 - What had been done to increase Covid-19 regulation enforcement in rural areas? The Commissioner drew attention to his previous remarks that the number of fines had doubled in the three weeks preceding the meeting. He added that £744,000 had been received from central government for the operation of further proactive patrols.
 - What occurred in the instance that emergency calls were not answered by the force control room? The Commissioner confirmed that calls were

transferred to another force if unanswered, he noted that Kent Police also answered calls on the behalf of other forces, as was standard practice.

- Whether there had been any Covid-19 outbreaks within Kent Police and if so, what effect that had. The Commissioner reassured the Panel that there had been no serious outbreaks, with instances few, low level and localised, which had made the impact on services manageable. He added that access to sufficient PPE and testing had aided resilience. It was noted that front line teams had been able to function at full strength throughout the pandemic.
- Had there been a role for the Police in vaccination activities? The Commissioner stated that the Police had not been involved, though would be at the appropriate time. He added that there remained no immediate concern that a police response was required.
- What lessons had been learnt during the first national lockdown and how had public communication been used, especially when addressing Domestic Abuse? The Commissioner confirmed that cooperation with local partners, which included Domestic Abuse services, charities and local authorities, on communications had been successful in raising awareness of Domestic Abuse. He noted that the Adolescent to Parent Violence Programme had highlighted an increase in intergenerational violence during the first lockdown. The Commissioner insisted that monitoring service demand with all partners was vital to ensure future resilience.
- Whether future pandemic related challenges to Kent Police were anticipated. The Commissioner noted that the single local restriction tier categorisation in Kent had been beneficial to operations. He specified future changes in guidance and regulations as the foremost short-term challenges. It was acknowledged that Kent Police were prepared to adapt operations in the event of local restriction tier changes.

8. Members thanked the Community Safety Unit (CSU) for their work and expressed gratitude to the Commissioner for contributing funding towards its operation.

RESOLVED that the Kent and Medway Police and Crime Panel note the report.

363. Victim Satisfaction Update

(Item B3)

1. The Commissioner began his Victim Satisfaction Update by highlighting his role within the sphere of victim satisfaction; the key areas covered by previous surveys and the consistent themes addressed across all three previous surveys. He added that there had been an improvement in victim satisfaction in the last year.
2. The introduction of new Domestic Abuse support teams was identified by the Commissioner as an expected area for future victim satisfaction improvements. He cited the Witness Care Unit and the Chief Constable's Crime Squad as services which would continue to improve victim confidence in Kent Police.

3. The Commissioner reminded the Panel that his previous Annual Policing Survey had contained a question on satisfaction and that he had been concerned with several responses.
4. Engagement was raised by the Commissioner as an area for future improvement. He confirmed that he had planned to increase satisfaction through engagement with victims in the following months and that efforts to increase cooperation with victim support charities would be built upon.
5. Members asked a range of questions in relation to the Victim Satisfaction Update. Key issues raised by the Panel and responded to by the Commissioner included the following:
 - Whether the Commissioner had been satisfied with Kent Police's response to low victim satisfaction rates. The Commissioner noted that figures had improved when compared to the previous year. He stated that improving the first point of contact with victims was key in achieving high rates of satisfaction. It was added that the impact of a failure to prosecute individuals could impact levels of satisfaction.
 - For the Commissioner to outline the actions he had taken to improve victim satisfaction. He confirmed that a new Victim's Code and Witness Charter had been introduced. The Commissioner added that the 2020 Annual Policing Survey satisfaction rate was greatly anticipated and that he would consider a separate survey for victim satisfaction if necessary.
 - How the views of young and vulnerable residents had been accounted for when considering the use of contextual qualitative data. The Commissioner noted that commissioned services were an important resource for relaying the views of vulnerable individuals and disclosing their satisfaction with services, Independent sexual violence advisors (ISVAs) were cited as a service specific example. With regard to engagement with young people, the Commissioner highlighted the Young People's Advisory Group (YPAG), school PCSOs and the Ministry of Justice's Victim's Panel as key engagement channels. The Panel was reminded that the Annual Policing Survey gave residents the chance to provide qualitative data, though it was noted that further work could be done to give individuals a greater opportunity to submit qualitative responses.
 - Whether PCSO community newsletters could be shared with communities using other means, including social media platforms. The Commissioner advised the Panel that Parish Councils published PCSO reports and newsletters. He noted that it was difficult to share community newsletters on social media platforms as members of the public had used previous posts as a means for reporting crime. The Commissioner confirmed that trials had taken place to test Next Door as a community information sharing platform.

RESOLVED that the Kent and Medway Police and Crime Panel note the report.

364. Mental Health - verbal update

(Item B4)

1. The Commissioner provided a verbal overview of mental health data and confirmed that a reduction in Section 136 cases had been anticipated for 2020, the first reduction in cases since monitoring began in 2014.
2. The Commissioner updated the Panel on national Mental Health developments, which he had been involved in as the Association of Police and Crime Commissioners' National Lead for Mental Health. He confirmed that he had conducted an inquiry into how Police forces had experienced mental health demands during the pandemic. He detailed the timeline for the inquiry, preliminary statistics and noted trends.
3. Safe Havens were addressed by the Commissioner. He reminded the Panel that four sites had been in operation and remained open during the second national lockdown. As well as physical services he noted that virtual and telephone support had been provided throughout. He confirmed that the Folkestone Safe Haven was operational and run by Hestia.
4. The Commissioner agreed to circulate the inquiry report with the Panel and confirmed that it was also available in the public domain.

RESOLVED that the Kent and Medway Police and Crime Panel note the verbal update.

365. Future work programme

(Item D1)

1. The Chairman outlined the future work programme and thanked the Commissioner for his reports, verbal updates and recent work during the pandemic.
2. A Member requested a report to address how the Commissioner had held Kent Police to account regarding their operations related to Britain's departure from the European Union.
3. At the request of a Member, the Commissioner agreed to provide a report on the actions taken to improve Victim Satisfaction, at a future meeting.

RESOLVED that the work programme be noted.

366. Questions to the Commissioner

(Item)

Question 1:

What do you see as the key learnings for the Police from the pandemic and how will you ensure that Kent Police action these learnings? (Elaine Bolton – Independent Member)

- The Commissioner outlined the positive impact of remote working arrangements which had highlighted the flexibility of Kent Police as an organisation. He confirmed that the organisation had not encountered PPE stock or supply chain issues.

Question 2:

We are keen to explore more ways to support victims of hate crime and see this as a priority, to also educate around what a hate crime is and change the mindset of those who commit these crimes. Will the PCC be supporting any key initiatives going forward in regards to hate crime? (Cllr Jenny Hollingsbee – Folkestone & Hythe Borough Council)

- The Commissioner confirmed that third party reporting hubs, which were used in Medway, had been a successful means of reporting hate crimes and supporting victims. He added that similar arrangements could have a positive impact in other local areas across Kent.

Question 3:

During 2020, the PCC undertook a survey of motoring offences on behalf of the Association of PCCs to support their Road Safety and Enforcement Survey. This discussed whether punishments for those offences should change. I am aware that some of the public also perceive sentencing of other crimes as being far too light, i.e. Life sentences should mean life, shop lifting punishments appear derisory. In fact the whole spectrum of sentencing, in my view, needs reviewing. As part of the PCC's previously stated objective to lobby for greater criminal justice powers and responsibilities, would this include working with other PCCs in lobbying government to undertake a review of all sentencing, taking into account the public desire to see the punishment fit the crime. (Cllr Mark Rhodes – Tonbridge and Malling Borough Council)

- The Commissioner stated that in some instances short sentences had had a negative impact on victims. He confirmed that he had supported the Police Federation of England and Wales in their campaign to increase sentences for crimes committed against public front line workers. The Commissioner added that he supported a future review of sentences; that rehabilitation be considered and that sentences reflect the severity of the crime committed.