

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, County Hall, Maidstone on Tuesday, 17 October 2023.

PRESENT: Mr P M Hill, OBE (Chairman), Mr G Sandher (Vice-Chairman), Cllr M Blakemore, Mrs E Bolton, Mr I S Chittenden, Cllr P Cole, Cllr L Edwards, Cllr P Feacey, Cllr Mrs J Hollingsbee, Cllr D Keers, Makinson, Mr J Meade, Cllr S Mochrie-Cox, Cllr R Palmer and Cllr L Parfitt-Reid

ALSO PRESENT: Mr M Scott (Kent Police and Crime Commissioner), Mr A Harper (PCC's Chief Executive), Mr R Phillips (PCC's Chief Finance Officer) and Mr N Wickens (OPCC - Head of Policy & Research)

IN ATTENDANCE: Mrs A Taylor (Scrutiny Research Officer) and Ms L Tricker (Democratic Services Officer)

UNRESTRICTED ITEMS

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

Mr Meade declared that he was the Chairman of Gravesham Pastors Charity.

101. Minutes of the Police and Crime Panel held on 27 June 2023 *(Item 4)*

The Chair raised some typographical errors in the minutes, and it was confirmed these amendments would be made.

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting held on 27 June 2023 were an accurate record and that they be signed by the Chairman.

102. Complaints Against the Commissioner - Annual Report 2022/23 *(Item B1)*

1. Mrs Taylor introduced the report and highlighted that the number of complaints received was low compared to other local authorities, and although the number had increased in 2022/23 this was largely due to repeated complaints that represented no overall concern.
2. Members did not have any comments or questions on the report.

RESOLVED to note the report.

103. Police and Crime Commissioner Annual Report *(Item B2)*

1. The Commissioner introduced the report and explained that it was a statutory function to produce an annual paper. This report covered the period between April 2022 and March 2023 and covered a year of substantial activity, for which he thanked officers within his office and the Panel. He highlighted the changes which had occurred during this period, which included the appointment of a new Chief Constable, who he felt had improved overall performance within the police force and was continuing to work on issues such as within the Force Control Room (FCR). There had also been several national projects undertaken such as the Police Uplift Programme which had seen Kent successfully recruit the 487 new police officers it had been allocated, bringing the total number of police officers to 4203, including 460 that were recruited prior to the national programme. This meant Kent now had an extra 1000 officers compared to six years ago, although retention remained an issue. He outlined that the next step was to increase the number of police staff.
2. The Commissioner highlighted the main areas within the report which were:
 - a. The commissioning element, which included commissioning programmes for victims. For example:
 1. Funding for victims had increased by 93% (from £2million to almost £4million) which included sexual abuse and domestic abuse advisers who were now in post supporting both men and women.
 2. The Victim Voice campaign which had launched in February 2023 and worked to ensure victims understood their rights and right to review. Thousands of victims had used this service and feedback was positive overall.
 3. The Victim Support Contract had formalised the Stalking Advocate and Hate Crime Advocate roles.
 4. The PCC had recommissioned the Restorative Justice programme.
 5. The Collaborate Digital programme had been launched which went into schools to teach children about online behaviour and healthy relationships.
 - b. The ongoing partnerships between the PCC and other organisations. These partnerships helped launch the Safer Streets programme, which had run until September 2023, and expanded CCTV across the county, engaged an active bystander's programme and improved street lighting. The Commissioner was also the Chairman of the Criminal Justice Board and worked closely with the Violence Reduction Unit.
 - c. Holding the Chief Constable to account and ensuring a good relationship. The Commissioner had focussed on holding the Chief Constable to account on the following issues:
 1. Public contact, including the call attrition rate for 101, which had dropped from 55% in 2022 to 5% in 2023.
 2. Mental health support, including the Right Care, Right Person scheme and response policing.
 3. The Neighbourhood Policing Review; whilst he regretted the loss of a number of PCSO's, he said the outcome was

positive with police officers going into neighbourhood roles. The Commissioner advised he had held the Chief Constable to account and would continue to monitor in the 2023/24 reporting year.

4. The criminal justice system and ensuring that Kent improved the quality of casefiles submitted to the Crown Prosecution Service (CPS).
 - d. The finances of Kent Police and the PCC to ensure a value for money service and good performance.
3. The Chair thanked the Commissioner for his hard work on the report including the progress made on the PEEL report, and the Panel looked forward to a full report on this in early 2024. He also thanked the Commissioner for his work on the Neighbourhood Policing Review and the commissioning work being undertaken for victims. He questioned whether the PCC was concerned regarding the backlog of cases within the court system and lack of prison spaces. The Commissioner stated that he was concerned about the criminal justice system, including the backlog of court cases which was partly due to COVID-19 but also difficulties in recruiting of judges and legal advisers. He had raised this issue with the Justice Minister as Kent had the second worst court backlog in the UK, and the police force needed to work closely with other departments to solve this issue. The Criminal Justice Board continued to monitor issues within the offender management system and would convene additional meetings if necessary.
4. The Chair requested an update on the criminal justice system to the Panel in 2024.
5. A Member thanked the Commissioner for his work on the report, including the mental health hubs outlined within the Making Kent Safer plan. A question was raised regarding the high call attrition rates for 101; if this had impacted on the numbers of people being able to report anti-social behaviour; and what services would be commissioned during 2023/24 to tackle anti-social behaviour. The Commissioner explained that the figures for anti-social behaviour could have been affected by 101 call attrition, but there were other methods of reporting such as online forms, although these were not a replacement for phones or in-person reporting. The figures would be closely monitored and compared this year, and residents would be encouraged to report all anti-social behaviour. Figures for anti-social behaviour could also have been affected by the new categorisations of crime, for example dangerous off-road motorbikes were no longer classed as anti-social behaviour, but categorised as crimes.
6. A Member asked if grant funding allocated to tackle national issues would be ringfenced to be spent in Kent. The Commissioner explained that the PCC did commission services to national charities, as well as local charities, but all services followed proper procurement rules, procedures, and contract management. The commissioning system allowed for a contribution to charities core funding, but 90% of funding had to be spent on victim services.

7. A Member thanked the Commissioner for his ongoing work regarding anti-social behaviour relating to off-road motorbikes but felt the categories of anti-social behaviour remained broad, and asked what was being done to ensure all anti-social behaviour was recorded and dealt with. The Commissioner explained that the categorisation and recording of anti-social behaviour had recently changed due to a Home Office counting rules amendment, which meant that the number of anti-social behaviour categories had decreased, with many now listed as crimes. The PCC would continue to monitor these figures closely and would speak to residents to discuss anti-social behaviour in their areas.
8. A Member asked what work was being undertaken to continue to tackle Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG), as some successes had been achieved but this remained a big issue. The Commissioner stated that VAWG remained a local and national priority and needed to include violence against men and boys. There were four upcoming events including White Ribbon Day and International Men's Day to raise awareness of this issue.
9. A Member questioned the mass coordination approach of the Serious Violence Duty and felt that this needed to be tailored to a more local approach, as had previously been discussed by the Panel. The Commissioner agreed to amend the Serious Violence Duty wording in his Annual Report to reflect discussions around a more local and networked approach.
10. A concern was raised regarding question 4 of the report on page 3, which showed a 4.3/10 satisfaction score and asked what could improve this score. The Commissioner explained that satisfaction surveys were most often influenced by how quickly cases were closed with no further action; and the number of updates provided to victims.
11. Members asked if the Commissioner could provide the numbers of domestic abuse victims satisfied with the service they received, rather than percentages, and the Commissioner agreed to circulate these figures after the meeting.
12. A question was asked regarding increasing the low level of resourcing for police officers, and how call wait times could be reduced. The Commissioner explained that a detailed piece of work had been undertaken to understand and reduce call waiting times and attrition, which had been 33% and 15-minute wait times in 2022. These figures had improved in 2023 as there were now more staff working at peak times. The Commissioner added that the Neighbourhood Policing Review was currently 50% resourced, but this would increase to 95% by March 2024 and 100% by September 2024. It had been felt that a slower implementation would work better to ensure it was fully embedded and there was appropriate capacity in other teams.
13. The Vice-Chair asked what steps the PCC would be undertaking in 2023/24 to tackle personal robbery, theft, vehicle crime, and drug crime. The Commissioner explained that he was working with the Chief Constable

on these issues and was receiving monthly, ward level crime data to monitor hotspots and hold the Chief Constable to account. This included closely monitoring the levels of shoplifting and engaging with Community Liaison Officers. In terms of drug offences, these figures fluctuated based on police activity, but was again being considered by the PCC on a monthly, ward level basis.

14. A concern was raised as no data was being collected about the satisfaction of people regarding the outcomes of cybercrime. The Commissioner agreed to take this proposal forward as part of the changes to Action Fraud.
15. A Member questioned how the PCC was holding the Chief Constable to account on the issue of speed enforcement, and how community safety policing was being utilised and linked to speeding. The Commissioner explained that Kent Police ensured speed enforcement using fixed cameras, mobile speed vans, and as part of the daily business for local police officers. Officers also received information from community speed watch groups to monitor hotspots and worked in partnership with these groups.
16. A Member highlighted that the number of 999 calls had increased, and the number of 101 had decreased, and asked if the public were aware of the differences between 999/101 and how they should be utilised. The Commissioner stated that these figures were indicative of a larger national trend and were partly due to 101 call attrition. Several makes of mobile phone also automatically called 999 when certain buttons were pushed or put in emergency mode, which meant an increased number of dropped calls.
17. A Member raised a concern with the number of shoplifters active in Kent, and asked how the PCC was holding the Chief Constable to account on this issue. The Commissioner explained that he was closely tracking this issue and one of the priorities in the Police and Crime Plan was that Kent Police must work with residents, communities and businesses to prevent crime and anti-social behaviour. He said the last two Performance and Delivery Board meetings had both included scrutiny of Kent Police's work on shoplifting and also the Shop Kind campaign. He said he had recently met with shop keepers and retailers across the county to understand the challenges they were experiencing. He reported that Kent Police had been more proactive around shoplifting and retail crime, with Neighbourhood officers currently supporting the Safer Business Week of Action by going out and meeting business owners face-to-face to understand their needs. They are using the fuller range of powers, including Criminal Behaviour Orders to ban repeat offenders from certain retailers and town centres and also charging more offenders. The Commissioner explained that shoplifting was also linked to organised crime and drug crime, so Kent Police continued to invest in drug rehabilitation services, mapping organised crime, and considering best practice when targeting prolific offenders.

18. A Member thanked the Commissioner and Kent Police for their work on tackling county lines, particularly in North Kent, and asked what work was being undertaken to stop children being exploited by county lines gangs. The Commissioner explained that 85 gangs associated with county lines had been mapped in Kent in July 2020, but this figure had reduced to below 40 in 2023 thanks to the work of Kent Police. County lines gangs had been known to groom, exploit and use sexual violence on children and this was being tackled in the following ways:
- a. Child centred policing to ensure a proportionate response when a child was found to be working in a county lines gang.
 - b. The Voice of the Child programme to ensure children were treated properly when victims or witnesses to a crime.
 - c. The work of Catch 22 and the St Giles Trust to promote a proactive anti-gang message in schools.
 - d. The Schools Team within the Neighbourhood Policing Review which would focus on crime and anti-social behaviour as part of county lines activity.

RESOLVED to review and comment on the Annual Report.

104. Contacting Kent Police *(Item B3)*

1. The Commissioner introduced the report and stated that it had previously been requested by the Panel due to the issues that had been faced by Kent Police over the past year. The report detailed the progress that had been made to recruit to the Force Control Room to answer 999 and 101 calls, and detailed the task given to the Chief Constable in 2022 to provide an explanation on the high rates of call attrition. The Commissioner explained that the demand on the Force Control Room (FCR) and the high vacancy rate had meant that 999 calls were prioritised over 101, leading to a call attrition rate of 55% in October 2022. In February and March 2023, the force had begun an over-recruitment process and redeployed police officers to the FCR. This had led to a reduction in call attrition in 2023/24 compared to 2022/23, although this would continue to be monitored. The Commissioner highlighted that digital contact with the public remained important, including the live chat function and contact us forms.
2. The Commissioner highlighted that front counters would remain an important point of contact, and four vacancies had already been filled to ensure front counters were re-opened.
3. The Chair felt that a 2% national benchmark for call attrition rates was high, and asked if Kent Police could do better than this benchmark. The Commissioner confirmed that Kent Police would target a lower benchmark figure.
4. A Member questioned if the automated 101 response would be updated. A concern was raised that the automated message was longer than 90 seconds, which was the target response time, which meant people were often waiting 180 seconds. The Commissioner confirmed that the Chief Superintendent had reviewed the automated response and felt that encouraging people to use digital services was an important message. He confirmed that the call waiting time

began when the automated response was finished and the phone started ringing.

5. A question was asked regarding implementing a system for residents to be able to track police officers, similar to how delivery drivers and food delivery drivers were tracked. The Commissioner stated that Kent Police were beginning to engage with a national solution to implement a new technology to track the location of police officers, similar to delivery drivers.
6. The Vice-Chair questioned how the police followed up with victims after a crime, and how this was measured. The Commissioner explained that the Home Office set expectations on the timeliness and quality of follow up for victims, and this was monitored independently. The PCC could access the performance dashboard to hold the Chief Constable to account over follow-ups with victims and to promote victims' rights and the right of review, for example Victim Voice which would be distributed to the Panel after the meeting.
7. A Member raised a concern with the live-chat function and sought assurance that this did not overwhelm officers within the Force Control Room. The Commissioner confirmed that the live chat function was additionality and would not be available during peak times when 999 and 101 call numbers were high. Digital contact methods could also be useful when needing to report a crime discreetly, for example domestic abuse crimes or crimes occurring in public areas.

RESOLVED to note the report.

105. Decision OPCC.D.034.23 - PFI North Kent Police Station

(Item C1)

1. The Chair felt concerned regarding the legality and legal processes surrounding the decision. The Commissioner confirmed that independent legal advice and counsel had been sought before undertaking the decision. A report would be brought before the Panel once the matter had been concluded, for the Panel to scrutinise.

RESOLVED to note the decision.

106. Decision OPCC.D.033.23 - Sale of IP Addresses

(Item C2)

1. The Commissioner thanked the OPCC for their work on this project, as proper process had been followed and money had been generated from the sale for capital funding.

RESOLVED to note the decision.

107. Questions to the Commissioner

(Item D1)

Question 1

An officer in Folkestone told me recently that while the force locally is carrying out more recruitment than it has in years, the real issue is retention. Does the Commissioner recognise this as a particular challenge and, if so, what plans or

measures are in place to address the problem of losing officers and the experience they take with them.

(Cllr Mike Blakemore, Folkestone and Hythe District Council)

1. The Commissioner stated that retention of police officers was important locally and nationally, as forces did not want to lose skills and experience. The Performance and Delivery Board had recently discussed this issue, the minutes of which were available online. Kent Police worked to retain police officers by increasing the South East Allowance to the maximum £3000; providing them with new equipment; and lobbying the government on their behalf on changes to legislation to make the job less difficult, such as response driving and firearms policing. The force also supported officers on their decisions, such as using stop and search powers proportionately. Policies were also in place to help retain staff such as mutual exchange postings, a financial wellbeing hub, the Develop You programme, retention ambassadors, and occupational health facilities.

Question 2

In his role in holding the Chief Constable to account and following statements by the Home Secretary recently which said police should 'follow every reasonable line of inquiry' can the Commissioner reassure the Panel that where in areas where CCTV services are provided by local authorities (or indeed by private holders) where crime or suspected crime is committed, the information, images and data captured are fully and 100% utilised as part of the investigative process by Kent Police for each and every report of a crime or incident as part of the commitment and requirement to investigate each and every crime and indeed there is proactive engagement between Kent Police and CCTV systems provided by local authorities to ensure that crimes are proactively investigated and action taken by Kent Police.

(Cllr Shane Mochrie-Cox, Gravesham Borough Council)

2. In response to the question, the Commissioner explained that authorised professional practice guidelines had recently been updated by the Home Office but depended on the circumstances of the case. It advised that police officers should identify CCTV near the location of a crime, including local authority or on private property. Police officers would then try to make links between CCTV through a digital ambassador programme, which would remove issues of collecting DVD or video CCTV evidence.

Question 3

Can the Commissioner explain how he is holding the Chief Constable to account for the priority 'protecting people from exploitation and abuse' and the safeguarding of domestic abuse victims in particular?

(Cllr Richard Palmer, Swale Borough Council)

3. In response to the question, the Commissioner explained that protecting people from abuse was one of Kent Police's priorities. It remained a standing item on the Performance and Delivery Board agenda and the Chief Constable reported regularly on the priority. The PCC regularly visited with teams such as the Vulnerability Investigative Team who tackled abuse and the Chief Finance Officer

represented the PCC on the Strategic Board and received bespoke briefings.

4. Cllr Palmer queried how domestic abuse victims could contact the PCC, as they could be intimidated reporting to police officers. The Commissioner confirmed that victims could report direct to the PCC, and to charities and third parties such as Crimestoppers.

RESOLVED to note the responses to the questions.

108. Future work programme

(Item E1)

It was confirmed that the commissioning report would not be presented in February 2024, but the PCC would provide a verbal update at the Chief Constable briefing in November.

RESOLVED to note the report.

109. Minutes of the Commissioner's Performance and Delivery Board meeting held on 7 June 2023

(Item F1)

RESOLVED that the minutes of the Performance and Delivery Board held on 7 June 2023 be noted.