

Kent Police and Crime Panel – the first twelve months

Introduction

The Kent and Medway Police and Crime Panel came into being on 22 November 2012, on the same date as the Kent Police and Crime Commissioner took office. The Panel has therefore now been in existence for almost twelve months and the Chairman has asked that a report on its activities over the first year be presented to the Panel.

Membership and Meetings

The Panel was established under the Police Reform and Social Responsibility Act 2011. Its responsibilities are set out in the Appendix. It has 20 members, consisting of 18 members nominated by the District Councils in Kent, Kent County Council and Medway Council, together with 2 independent members. Including today's meeting, the Panel has met 7 times during the year, but also met twice as a Shadow Panel prior to being formally established. The first full business meeting, in February 2013, was preceded by a briefing on the work and structure of the Force and its finances together with a briefing on the Panel's powers and responsibilities. A further briefing was held prior to the Panel's first confirmation hearing (for the Commissioner's Chief of Staff).

Operating procedures

The Panel undertook some initial work, some in consultation with the Commissioner, to establish its operating procedures. It appointed 2 independent members and it approved:-

- Panel arrangements
- Operating Procedures
- Code of Conduct for members
- Procedure for handling complaints against the Commissioner
- Interim Information Sharing Agreement with the Commissioner's office
- Interim protocol for advising the Panel of the Commissioner's decisions

The Panel also established a Sub-Panel to consider any complaints against the Commissioner.

Matters considered

The Commissioner has discharged all her formal responsibilities to bring matters to the Panel for consideration. These include her draft Police and Crime plan, and proposed precept and her Annual Report and Statement of Accounts. The Panel endorsed her plan and supported her proposal to increase the precept by 2% in order to fund 60 additional police officers and 20 PCSOs. The panel were particularly pleased to note her intention to give grants at the same level as in 2011/12. Later in the year the Panel were encouraged to hear of the Commissioner's intention to make grant decisions in 2013/14 for a 3 year period.

The Panel noted the intention in the Commissioner's Plan to pilot local policing Forums and expressed concern that they should work with existing democratic structures. The Commissioner subsequently advised the Panel in more detail of how she planned to communicate and consult with local communities and the Panel were satisfied with the approach.

Following consideration of the Plan, the Panel adopted a work programme of reports that it wished to see from the Commissioner to ensure that the Panel reviewed and reported on most aspects of the Police and Crime Plan and on the Commissioner's range of responsibilities over the year. The Commissioner has complied with all requests from the Panel for reports, which have included:-

- Progress in establishing a Sexual Assault Referral Centre in Kent
- Community Safety Landscape
- Victim Support
- The Commissioner's strategy on Consultation and Engagement
- Mobile police stations (now called police contact points)
- Local Policing Forums
- Deployment of additional officers and PCSOs

The Panel have taken a particular interest in the Commissioner's proposal to appoint a Youth Commissioner. The Panel endorsed the intention in the Police and Crime Plan and, in April, discussed the planned appointment in detail. The panel were given legal advice that they were not able to discuss the particular issues that had arisen in relation to the individual appointed but they endorsed the Commissioner's decision to commission a review of the recruitment process. The findings of the review were discussed in detail later in the year and the Panel continued to endorse the Commissioner's desire to engage directly with young people.

The Panel's consideration of the Commissioner's plan to appoint a Youth Commissioner was criticised by the Home Affairs Select Committee. The Panel considered the Committee's report and resolved to advise the Committee's Chairman that the criticisms were unwarranted and based on an incorrect understanding of the Panel's powers. To date no substantive response has been received from the Committee's Chairman.

Confirmation hearings

The Panel held 2 confirmation hearings during the year – for the Chief of Staff and the Chief Finance Officer. In both cases the person proposed by the Commissioner was questioned by the Panel and the Commissioner was also questioned about the appointment. Both appointments were approved by the Panel. Arrangements for these hearings have been complicated by the Commissioner's need to undertake vetting prior to the proposed appointment (which involves outside bodies with indeterminate timescales) and the statutory requirement that the Panel conducts a confirmation hearing within 3 weeks of the Commissioner's announcement of her proposed appointment.

Commissioner's decisions and information

The Commissioner is required to notify the Panel of all her decisions. An interim protocol was approved to balance the Commissioner's need to be able to conduct her business efficiently and expeditiously with the Panel's wish to be able to express views on those decisions at an appropriate time. During the year the Commissioner notified the Panel of 27 decisions, including 2 proposed appointments. In addition she notified the Panel of her renewed decision to appoint a Youth Commissioner at the Panel meeting where the review report was discussed. The Panel noted almost all the decisions. The exception was her

decision to appoint 3 advisers in November 2012 without competition and, subsequently, to extend the contract of 2 of those advisers. The Panel expressed some concern about the manner and duration of these appointments but were told by the Commissioner that the contracts were necessary to provide her with support pending the determination of her permanent office structure and that the contracts would be finishing at the end of October 2013.

In October the Panel commissioned a review of the interim protocol.

The Commissioner is legally required to publish certain information on her website, including information on expenditure over £500. Expenditure information is routinely reported to the Panel for information and the Panel's officers monitor the other published information so that they can advise Panel members of any matter of particular importance. Officers also monitor published information to ensure that the Commissioner is complying with all her statutory duties to publish information. During the year there were no matters of particular importance or concern to draw to the Panel's attention.

The Commissioner holds the Chief Constable to account through Governance Board which she holds in public. Panel members have a standing invitation to attend these meetings and the minutes are shown to the Panel to note and to enable the Panel to review this aspect of the Commissioner's responsibilities.

Complaints against the Commissioner

During the year there were no complaints against the Commissioner for the Panel to consider.

Conclusion

The Panel has established a sound working relationship with the Commissioner and has been very largely supportive of her decisions and plans. There have been a few areas where the Panel have wanted to question the Commissioner, to make suggestions and to express critical views but the clear motivation of the Panel at all times has been to help the Commissioner to get the best possible policing service in Kent.