

From: Ann Barnes, Kent Police and Crime Commissioner
To: Kent Police and Crime Panel
Subject: Police Contact Points

Executive summary:

- PCPs staffed by a dedicated team of PCSOs
- Provide a countywide, 7 days a week resource
- Facilitate local engagement, and support both critical incidents and community events
- Support force operations providing crime prevention advice
- As a force operational resource PCPs are subject to continuous review and assessment

Introduction:

1. This report has been commissioned for the Kent Police and Crime Panel and is intended to provide a review of the role of Police Contact Points since their inception and an assessment of that role in the future, including developments in their organisation and implementation. Given the largely operational nature of the information contained, the Commissioner's office acknowledge Kent Police's assistance in providing the relevant operational information contained in this report.

Background

2. The Police and Crime Commissioner's pre-election manifesto included a pledge to introduce a fleet of Mobile Police Stations (Police Contact Points) to support enhanced engagement in rural communities and make it easier for those communities to access policing services. Following funding provision by the Commissioner, the existing fleet of Mercedes Sprinter vans was refurbished and a phased county roll out completed on 4th September 2013 under the operational direction of the Chief Constable.
3. The scheme initially ran from Wednesday to Sunday each week with a fixed schedule over a fortnightly period. The aim was for each of the six vehicles to achieve three engagements each shift over the fortnightly schedule.
4. Initially, District PCSOs were used to staff Police Contact Points (PCPs). However, a dedicated team of 15 PCSOs has now been recruited and trained. They took up full responsibility for the program w/c 22nd April 2014.
5. As with any new scheme it was decided to keep working practises under constant review and to adjust and amend the time spent at each venue from 90 minutes to an hour to free up time at the end of each shift to deploy to crime and ASB hotspots. This had a positive impact in that we ensure that PCPs are deployed to areas which need them most. This is something that we will continue into the future.
6. It was also decided at an early stage that PCPs would be an ideal platform to act as focal points for community engagement within Critical Incident scenarios. A recent and high profile example of this was the extreme flooding experienced in Yalding during the Christmas/New Year period where the PCP provided a base for police activity and a reassuring presence for the community. Without doubt, where appropriate circumstances prevail, they could be used very effectively for similar incidents in the future.
7. They are also a flexible resource to deploy in response to force priorities; a good example being their county-wide involvement in Operation Tri-Star which focussed on burglary reduction towards the end of 2013. In December 2013 and January 2014 the teams concentrated on giving crime prevention advice to residents in hotspot areas.

Phase 2 – new developments

8. We have now concluded the first phase of the initiative. Whilst the project is still relatively new, only being a year since the first PCP deployed in East Kent, we have already implemented a number of changes which will ensure the project remains responsive to community needs.

Developments include:-

- The project operates through a dedicated team of 15 PCSOs who took up responsibility for the initiative in April 2014, the investment bringing with it increased continuity and resilience. Consideration is currently being given to reinforcing this investment in staffing with the purchase of an additional van in order to provide a similar resilience in equipment.
- The new scheme covers a combination of fixed venues, dynamic response to daily business priorities, and ring-fenced weekends to attend community events.
- By reviewing shift patterns, we have been able to extend PCP coverage and have amended deployment times to provide greater coverage from the initial five days to seven days.
- Routes and venues have been amended. Experience has shown that some initial locations did not attract sufficient visitor numbers so new venues have been selected. These include some original popular venues but also carefully chosen larger venues taking into account issues of crime, ASB, visibility and confidence. The emphasis is now on being a pro-active visible patrol. All fixed venues are decided by District CSU's, having considered attendance and demand data (based on crime, ASB, violence, local priorities) along with local knowledge of each District. Locations will be changed regularly according to demand.
- Each weekday PCPs attend three fixed venues a day followed by a 'dynamic deployment' to a crime, ASB or other hotspot.
- Flexibility has been built in to enable the PCP to respond to changing crime and ASB hotspots, repeat crime locations and areas vulnerable to seasonal crime trends. As a result we will extend the PCP range into some urban locations.
- Attending fetes, fairs and other kinds of community events presents an excellent opportunity for public engagement and bespoke crime prevention advice. Weekends are kept free and event organisers invited to bid for PCP attendance at events. The means to bid are well sign posted and can be found on the Kent Police website (contact us/Police Contact Points and then follow the links).
- Offering crime prevention material at vulnerable locations presents a good opportunity to engage with the public and give crime prevention advice. Distributing purse chains, shed alarms and similar items to potentially vulnerable people in focussed locations can also be a cost effective crime prevention measure. All PCP vans were stocked with such items in support of the latest Operation Castle burglary campaign. We will continue to do this for future initiatives.
- Interest has now been expressed by partner agencies in joining forces and we will explore ways to work with others in areas of mutual interest.
- Routes and venues will be constantly reviewed and assessed to ensure the best uptake and outcomes.
- Details of the locations and timings are published on the Kent Police website (visit www.kent.police.uk/contactus) and tweeted by the PCSO staffing via a Twitter account. Parish Councils are advised of current routes and venues and any changes necessitated.

Conclusion

9. Police Contact Points have undergone significant development over the past 12 months. They are now a more local resource that is still delivering the original objective of providing enhanced engagement and access to policing services. During the same period the force has also undergone change, but the initiative remains entirely complimentary to our evolving policing model, with the focus very much on locally delivered policing services. PCPs now provide District Commanders with a flexible resource which can be quickly and easily directed towards District policing priorities, helping to address threats, harm and risk as they occur.
10. Attending weekend events is already proving popular with significant numbers visiting PCPs and this is something that we would expect to increase, particularly in the summer months. This is supportive of the requirements for local visible engagement and the demand profiles for Kent Police.
11. Finally, as with all operational deployments, Kent Police will continue to review and evaluate this initiative to ensure that it remains responsive to community needs.