

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, 9 September 2014.

PRESENT: Mr P M Hill, OBE (Chairman), Mr Gurvinder Sandher (Vice-Chairman), Cllr P Clokie, Cllr P Todd, Cllr L Wicks, Cllr R Turpin, Cllr P Fleming, Cllr M Dearden, Cllr M Rhodes, Mr R A Latchford, OBE, Mr G Cowan, Cllr K Pugh (Substitute for Mr A H T Bowles) and Mr Dan McDonald

ALSO PRESENT: Mrs A Barnes, Mr M Stepney, Mr S Nolan, Ms L Steward and Ms C Gatward

IN ATTENDANCE: Mr S Beaumont (Head of Community Safety and Emergency Planning) and Mr J Cook (Scrutiny Research Officer)

UNRESTRICTED ITEMS

100. Minutes of the Meeting held on 24th July 2014

(Item 4)

1. The Chairman raised a matter arising relating to a question from the last meeting regarding the applications by the Commissioner to the Police Innovation Fund to support purchasing new technological equipment. The Commissioner stated that the matter was still being explored and that a more detailed update with the outcome could be provided at a later date.

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting held on the 24th of July 2014 be approved as a correct record and that they be signed by the Chairman.

101. Victim Services

(Item B1)

1. The Commissioner provided a detailed overview of the Victim Services paper, explaining that the various elements were all too important to be summarised.
2. The Commissioner explained that presently, the Ministry of Justice (MoJ) commissions a 'one-size-fits all' service from the national charity Victim Support. As of October 2014, funding and the responsibility for commissioning victim services will be devolved to Police and Crime Commissioners though the current contract with Victim Support does not expire until March 31st 2015.
3. In August 2014, the Commissioner decided to utilise the Old Court Building in Ashford for the Victims' Centre, with this decision based on a scoping of the options. The concept of a Victims' Centre had been developed by partner agencies through a multi-agency design event which was sponsored by the Commissioner. This work was also importantly, influenced by discussions with

victims to ensure that their views and experiences could be kept at the heart of developments.

4. Some important gaps in the victim support processes that were identified through this event included lack of focus on the victim as an individual, no shared standards across agencies, poor data sharing, too much emphasis on the offender for managing trigger points, no central point of contact for victims and no efficient database or management system.
5. This process has been guided by a needs assessment provided by Portsmouth University which closely examined victim experiences and current service provision.
6. The Commissioner stated that she welcomed the devolution of commissioning victim services to PCC's as it presented a 'once in a lifetime opportunity' for better local control and tailoring of services.
7. Some key issues raised by the report included the need for SPOCs as victims did not want to have to speak to numerous agencies and people.
8. The Commissioner stressed that it was understood that the needs of the victim must always come before the needs of service.
9. The Commissioner explained that the programme for developing the new model is taking place in two phases. Phase one is the transition of control from the MoJ to the Commissioner and will include initial commissioning of Victim Support, the current contract holder, for a further year starting in April 2015. This will allow continuity of service as well as the opportunity to adapt their existing services to more appropriate locally tailored delivery. A key improvement early on will be the co-locating of victim services with Kent Police's own Witness Care unit in the new Ashford site.
10. While the existing provider will continue to provide services, this allows enough time for all the relevant partner agencies to work together to agree the best system for long term victim care in Kent, identifying appropriate specialist services for commissioning and to understand the complexities of how the various agencies interact and where this may create gaps.
11. The refurbishment of the Ashford site will be funded by through the funds provided by the Ministry of Justice. This refurbishment will ensure the building it is fit for purpose and in a high quality state for the commencement of service while still reducing overall expenses by using existing police estate.
12. The Commissioner explained that while a lot of attention had been paid to getting the Kent Victim Centre in Ashford right, it was important to note that this would serve as a co-ordination centre and that outreach work and engagement with other local services around the county was expected in the future.
13. Phase 2 will focus on bringing all the appropriate Criminal Justice Sector Agencies and support providers together to design and agree the best possible model. So far there has been good partnership working and buy in from the relevant agencies and Kent's Chief Constable is fully supportive of the project.

14. The Commissioner commented that this has all been achieved against a background of extreme financial challenge which makes the successes so far, that much more worth emphasising. The Commissioner concluded her overview by reiterating that all the current evidence indicates that this new model of local control of victim services is an excellent opportunity to improve the experiences of victims in Kent.
15. The Chairman thanked the Commissioner for her overview, commenting that it was positive to hear that consideration had been given to outreach work and satellite provision. He requested clarification on whether these would be managed by Victim Support or if the Victim Centre would engage with existing support networks such as the District based One Stop Shops which provide multi-agency support particularly in the area of Domestic Abuse. The Commissioner explained that the Victim Centre, in its capacity as a base for victim support services, would signpost and refer appropriate individuals to the most suitable service which in many cases could include their local one stop shop.
16. Several Members questioned the Commissioner on the issue of centralisation versus local control and that while the benefits of a centralised unit were recognised, information sharing and joint best practice, it was stressed that victims should not be expected to travel to access these services. Concerns were raised that the Ashford location would be designed to suit the needs of professionals rather than victims.
17. The Commissioner challenged these assertions, explaining that the Victim Centre would have excellent facilities for those victims able to access them on site but would maintain a flexible approach to referring and engaging with victims to more local services to minimise travel and disruption, effectively fulfilling the role of a co-ordination Centre.
18. Mr Stepney added that the current strategy is designed to result in the best possible 'middle way' between centralised but high quality services and disparate, accessible services that have historically suffered from lack of corporate support. This approach would require extensive partnership working and inter-agency co-operation through operating agreements and formal commitments. The co-designing of the service was important as none of the agencies have the power to dictate to the others about how to deliver their services but discussion and pre-implementation agreements are resulting in a best compromise outcome.
19. The Vice-chair suggested that the Victim Centre's project board could benefit from Police and Crime Panel Member involvement and the Commissioner agreed that this would be explored.
20. Members sought clarification on the lack of specific mention in the reports of supporting victims that were children and young people. The Commissioner responded by explaining that this gap had been identified and was being addressed in the new plan.
21. Members stated that they believed this was a good opportunity to examine the current contract held with Victim Support and to consider whether it achieves the following key outcome; will the first referral result in the victim being advised

appropriately about which services they can access and that they are directed to the most suitable one? The Commissioner explained that the Portsmouth research has provided a map of service provision that will be used both to assist with referrals in the first instance but also help identify gaps that will be addressed through commissioning further services, potentially with our partner agencies.

22. The Commissioner agreed to share the service map provided by the Portsmouth Research with the Members.
23. The Commissioner advised the Panel that she was aware of an increase in demand for victim services of the following types; sexual abuse of men, support for children and young people and hate crime. These increase areas have been noted and will be addressed as the plan continues to evolve.
24. The Commissioner could give no assurances that the new system would prevent all serious issues (references made to the Rotherham Child abuse issue) but stated that she was confident that the Victim Centre was a positive piece of work that would improve the support for all victims of crime.

RESOLVED that the Panel thank the Commissioner for her report; that the report be noted and that the Panel note the Commissioner's offer to consider Panel membership of the Victim Centre Project Board and to share the Portsmouth research with the Panel.

102. Commissioner's Correspondence *(Item B2)*

1. The Commissioner introduced the paper outlining the level of correspondence received and managed by her office. The Commissioner explained that it was important to look beyond the figures and consider the complexities and detailed decision-making involved in effectively managing all the different types of correspondence received.
2. The Commissioner explained that all correspondence had to be responded to effectively; this meant that it was not a simple matter of a response being sent back and that a significant amount of case management was involved. This could take the form of making suitable referrals to the appropriate partner agency or Kent Police and then either using the response provided to update the member of the public, or following up subsequently to confirm that appropriate action has been taken.
3. The Commissioner explained that given the emotive and complex nature of the criminal justice system, her office regularly deals with irate members of the public, some of whom are bringing repeat or vexatious complaints to her attention, which have already been addressed appropriately through the accepted protocols. In addition, a number of callers and correspondents experience mental health issues which can require careful handling by the officers. This has prompted her staff to undergo further training in effective communication, and also some have been specifically trained on understanding mental health conditions. The Commissioner highlighted this as an example of how well her staff has managed the complexities of ongoing communication with the public on policing issues.

4. The Commissioner was positive about the role her office plays in being a conduit for information and referrals to appropriate services and partner agencies and was confident that her office handled the sizeable and complex correspondence well.
5. The Commissioner expressed her gratitude to the public for corresponding with her office and to her officers for their exemplary professionalism in dealing with the large amount of correspondence and telephone enquiries that required careful management and swift action.
6. A Member raised a concern regarding the risk of inappropriately labelling correspondents as vexatious due to calling repeatedly. Laura Steward, OPCC Head of Standards and Regulation, explained that the individual was not labelled as vexatious or repeat but rather the issue they raised, if appropriate, could be deemed to be so. This was only the case where complaints or issues were repeatedly raised after they have been appropriately addressed or were being dealt with by another agency and further action by the Commissioner or her office would be inappropriate.
7. A discussion took place in which members questioned the accuracy of the initial report that claimed that the PCC's office dealt with 9000 pieces of correspondence when officer investigation had suggested that 76% of this was immediately referred to Kent Police for handling.
8. Firstly the Commissioner and her Chief of Staff explained that, the 9000 figure did not include daily email communications as part of normal business but referred instead to direct contact from the public and relevant partner agencies relating to specific issues requiring action.
9. Secondly, when it was suggested that the Commissioner's office only dealt with 24%) of her correspondence, the Commissioner stated that while it was often the case that the correspondence related to operational matters and as such had to be referred to the Force, the OPCC still had to review and confirm this in every case which took up staff time and involved research, and the member of the public was always contacted by the Office. In addition, all referrals were followed up with residents by the OPCC to confirm that appropriate action had been taken by the Force or other partner agency. Mr Stepney stressed that while the OPCC may not take direct action on all correspondence, significant work was undertaken to ensure that any concerns expressed by those communicating with the OPCC were appropriately addressed.
10. A Member referenced one of the purposes of Police and Crime Commissioners in terms of the need to make policing more democratically accountable, suggesting that a good method of improving wider involvement in the management of public complaints would be to ensure information is made available that categorises the complaints and correspondence received by the Force and the Commissioner's office in a manner that gives a good indication of the key issues and developing trends.

11. The Commissioner agreed that having an effective system of categorising and managing complaints is vital and assured the Panel that such a system was in development.
12. Laura Steward explained that the main type of complaint against the Force was 'Other neglect or failure in duty' in terms of crime investigations or not keeping victims updated. Ms Steward stated that the Force was aware of this trend and that action was being taken by the Force to identify root causes and address any significant issues.
13. The Commissioner explained that her office discusses police complaints with the Independent Police Complaints Commission (IPCC) on a regular basis to ensure shared understanding of key trends and issues. The Commissioner also clarified that her office may only refer complaints to the IPCC if they are against the Commissioner or the Chief Constable, and meet the relevant criteria. All other police complaints are dealt with internally through the Force's Professional Standards Department or referred to the IPCC by the Force if required.
14. Laura Steward further commented that resident dissatisfaction issues raised with the Commissioner's office are referred to the Force but are followed up thoroughly through the OPCC's case management system.

RESOLVED that the Panel thank the Commissioner for her report and note its contents.

103. Future work programme
(Item D1)

1. The Vice-chair suggested that the Commissioner discuss the planned Ethics Committee at a future meeting. The Commissioner agreed to this.
2. The Chairman suggested that the Commissioner discuss the matter of the Victim Centre again next year to review progress. The Commissioner agreed to this.

RESOLVED that the Panel will receive reports on the Ethics Committee and the Victim Centre at future meetings.

104. Panel Communications Strategy
(Item D2)

RESOLVED that the Panel agree the updated communication protocol.