

Kent and Medway Police and Crime Panel – Annual Report for 2014

Introduction

1. The Panel considered and agreed a report in November 2013 on the first year of operation. This report summarises Panel activities during 2014.

Membership of the Panel

2. During the year the membership of the Panel was adjusted following District Council elections to ensure appropriate representation of the political parties in Kent and Medway. As a consequence there is now one Liberal Democrat member and one UKIP member of the Panel. Representation of other parties remained unchanged. Mike Hill remained Chairman throughout the year. Cllr Rupert Turpin was Vice-Chair until May and Gurvinder Sandher was elected Vice-Chair in May.

Meetings

3. During the year the Panel met 6 times and the Complaints Sub-Panel met once. In addition to the meetings Panel members also met with the Commissioner and her staff on 2 occasions. These informal meetings were intended to promote understanding and a sound working relationship with the Commissioner. The Chairman and Vice-Chair also held meetings with the Commissioner from time to time to assist and support the smooth running of Panel business.

Panel business

4. The Panel met its statutory duty to consider and make recommendations on the Commissioner's draft Police and Crime plan and her proposed precept. The Panel supported the Commissioner's Police and Crime Plan and commended her decision to remove targets from the Plan. The Commissioner asked the Panel to support a precept increase of up to 3.5% but the Panel recommended that the precept increase be no more than 2%.
5. The Panel met its statutory duty to consider the Commissioner's Annual Report for 2013/14. The Panel asked for an addition to be made to provide a fuller picture of matters dealt with by the Commissioner and the Commissioner agreed to this change.
6. The Panel considered crime figures and crime recording in Kent on 2 occasions. The Panel was pleased to note that the Commissioner had requested a thorough investigation when concerns were raised about whether all crimes were being accurately recorded. The Panel was also pleased to note that the Commissioner supported the Force's efforts to instil culture change and to end any performance driven culture within the Force, although they were also keen to understand how the Commissioner intended to hold the Chief Constable to account in the absence of numeric targets. The Panel noted the Commissioner's assurance that the accuracy of

crime recording is now very high and that the public can have confidence in the published crime figures.

7. In October all Police and Crime Commissioners took on responsibility for commissioning and funding victim services and the Panel asked the Commissioner to report on these new responsibilities. The Panel was supportive of the Commissioner's desire to ensure that victims received support at the first point of referral rather than being referred on to various agencies. The Panel recognised that the provision of a Victim Centre offered opportunity for information sharing and joint best practice but was also encouraged by the Commissioner's references to outreach and satellite provision.
8. The Panel asked the Commissioner to explain the work she was doing to implement the Mental Health Concordat, agreed nationally by Police and Crime Commissioners, the Association of Chief Police Officers and other bodies. The Panel was very supportive of the Commissioner's efforts to ensure that all agencies engaged with mental health issues and that the police did not find themselves dealing with mental health issues that were the responsibility of others.
9. The Panel continued to take an interest in the Youth Commissioner and considered a report on her activities to date. They were supportive of the work being done and remain interested in the Commissioner's plans once the current postholder's contract finishes.
10. The Commissioner took part in a Channel 4 documentary that, when transmitted, led to significant criticism of the Commissioner by both members of the public and the media. The Panel held 2 meetings to consider the reaction to the programme and the possible impact on the reputation of the Commissioner and the police. The Panel was critical of the Commissioner's decision to take part in the programme and decided that the programme had damaged both the Commissioner personally and the office of the Police and Crime Commissioner. The Panel also requested a change of style and a change of approach to public engagement by the Commissioner. The Panel was pleased that the Commissioner responded positively to these comments and conclusions and gave the Panel details of her revised approach to community engagement. The Panel was also pleased that the Commissioner decided not to pursue the idea of directly managing the Communications team in the Force.

Complaints and correspondence

11. The complaints sub-Panel met once to consider 2 complaints against the Commissioner. In both cases the Sub-Panel decided not to uphold the complaints. The Panel asked its officers to review the Commissioner's correspondence to ensure that all correspondence that should be treated as a complaint was being treated in this way; officers carried out this review and confirmed this was the case. The Panel also noted that the procedure for determining whether a matter constituted a complaint was strengthened during the year by the Commissioner's Monitoring Officer advising Panel officers on each occasion when he decided to dis-apply the Regulations.

Commissioner's decisions

12. The Commissioner met her responsibility to inform the Panel of decisions of significant public interest at each meeting. In the main these were noted by the Panel but there were a few occasions when members sought clarity or further explanation, which the Commissioner provided. The Commissioner also published details of expenditure in excess of £500 and Panel members were briefed by officers on expenditure of particular interest.

Conclusion

13. 2014 was a busy year for the Panel. The Panel discharged its formal responsibilities to consider the Commissioner's Police and Crime Plan, her proposed precept and her Annual Report. The Panel also received reports on a number of the major elements of the Police and Crime Plan.
14. Generally the Panel was supportive of much of the Commissioner's work but felt there was scope for a closer working relationship which would benefit both sides and to this end the informal meetings which have taken place have been a step forward as has the change in tone and style of the Commissioner since the Channel 4 documentary. The Panel hopes that this new approach can continue into 2015.