

Kent and Medway Police and Crime Panel Annual Report 2016

Police and Crime Commissioner Election

1. For the first part of the year, the Panel continued to review and report on the actions and decisions of Commissioner Mrs Ann Barnes. PCC elections were held across England and Wales in May. Panel officers provided information on the role and work of the Panel to include in a briefing pack provided by the Commissioner's Chief of Staff to all Kent PCC candidates. Following the election of Mr Matthew Scott as Commissioner in May the Chairman held an early informal meeting with the new Commissioner to start the process of establishing a sound working relationship with the Panel.

Meetings

2. During the year the Panel met 5 times and the Complaints Sub-Panel met once. The Chairman and Vice-Chair held meetings with the new Commissioner from time to time to assist and support the smooth running of Panel business. An informal briefing for Panel members with the Chief Constable took place in November, at which the Chief Constable explained the work of the Force and engaged in discussion with Panel members about policing in Kent and Medway. Panel members found this to be a very useful discussion.

Panel business

3. The Panel met its statutory duty in February to consider and make recommendations on the outgoing Commissioner's draft Police and Crime plan and her proposed precept. The Panel supported the Police and Crime Plan and approved the recommended £5 per household (average) precept increase, although advising caution about the retention of a high level of reserves. The Panel noted that the increase was, in part, to enable the Chief Constable to recruit additional firearms officers. The newly elected Commissioner presented his revised Police and Crime Plan in September which the Panel also supported, while noting that the Commissioner intended to present a fuller 4 year Plan and proposed precept in 2017. The Panel sought and obtained an assurance from the new Commissioner that the funding for additional firearms officers remained in the budget.
4. The Panel met its statutory duty to consider the outgoing Commissioner's Annual Report for 2015 at her last meeting. The Panel subsequently noted the Commissioner's accounts for 2015/16.
5. The Panel held a confirmation hearing for the Commissioner's Chief of Staff to consider the extended appointment of Mr Harper until 2018. The Panel supported the appointment. The Panel also held a confirmation hearing for the Commissioner's Chief Finance Officer, Mr Phillips, and supported the appointment.

6. The Panel discussed a report from the outgoing Commissioner about her work with young people and the establishment of the Youth Advisory Group. While the Panel were supportive of her efforts to engage with young people they continued to feel that more use should be made of existing arrangements and were pleased to hear from the new Commissioner later in the year that he intended to engage with the Medway Youth Parliament and the KCC Youth County Council, among other existing groups.
7. The new Commissioner briefed the Panel at his first meeting on his initial thoughts and the emphasis he was placing on mental health. The Panel has discussed mental health with the Commissioner at all subsequent meetings and fully supports the emphasis he is placing on this subject. The Panel has also received and discussed reports on roads policing and support for victims.
8. In September the Panel introduced a new regular agenda item of “questions to the Commissioner”. The Panel welcomed the Commissioner’s willingness to answer questions, of which he had been given prior notice. The agenda item has provided a greater opportunity for Panel members to raise issues with the Commissioner that do not form part of his formal reports.

Complaints

9. The Panel received a report on complaints against the previous Commissioner and was pleased to note that, as in every previous year, the number of complaints was very low and none had been upheld. The Panel also submitted comments in response to the Government’s proposals to change the procedure for dealing with complaints against a Commissioner. To date none of the proposed changes have been implemented.

Commissioner’s decisions

10. Both the outgoing and the newly-elected Commissioner met their responsibility to inform the Panel of decisions of significant public interest at each meeting. The new Commissioner has adopted a much fuller statement of the business case and reasons for his decisions which the Panel has found very helpful. Both Commissioners also published details on their website of expenditure in excess of £500. The new Commissioner has also provided a report to the Panel drawing attention to some of these items and their significance. The Panel welcomed this increased level of openness and transparency. Panel members were also briefed by officers on expenditure of particular interest.

Payments to Panel members

11. The Panel agreed to pay an allowance of £500 per annum to independent members, after considering that a number of other Panels made payments to independent members and that members nominated to the Panel by their Council were able to claim an attendance allowance for Panel meetings.

Panel terms of reference

12. The Panel's terms of reference require them to be reviewed annually. It is considered convenient to do this at the same time as the Panel reviews its work over the past year. The terms of reference were amended in April to clarify the arrangements for nominating independent members and also to clarify the period for which independent members could serve without the need for further advertisement and competition. . No further changes to the terms of reference are required at this time. The full terms of reference can be found by following this [link](#).

Panel budget

13. The Panel's terms of reference also require the Panel to review its budget on an annual basis. Finance for the Panel's work comes from a Home Office grant which has been constant at £63,340 since the Panel was established and is likely to be the same in 2017/18. In 2014/15, expenditure was £30,344 and in 2015/16 it was £31,715. Expenditure consists of reimbursement of Members' expenses and the cost of administrative and policy support to the Panel. It estimated that the outturn for 2016/17 will be similar - approximately half of the grant. The Panel can therefore be assured that its costs are contained well within the money provided by the Home Office.

Conclusions

14. This has been a year of transition for the Panel because of the change of Commissioner. Panel members have commented favourably on the constructive relationship that has developed with the new Commissioner and on the Commissioner's willingness to engage with the Panel.

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