

**Report by:** Kent and Medway Police and Crime Panel

**SUBJECT:** Kent Police and Crime Commissioner's draft refreshed Safer in Kent: The Community Safety and Criminal Justice Plan 2017-21 and proposed precept for 2018/19

**Date:** 8<sup>th</sup> February 2018

## **PANEL DECISIONS**

The Panel supports the refreshed Safer in Kent plan and recommends:-

- that the Plan wording be amended at Section 5 to make clearer what is meant by "denying use of the county's road network to those intent on causing harm through criminality";
- that child sexual exploitation be mentioned more explicitly within the Plan priorities: and
- that there is a specific reference to support for witnesses in the "plan on a page".

The Panel unanimously approves the Commissioner's proposal to increase the police precept for 2018/19 by 7.6%.

## **Background**

1. The Panel have a statutory duty under the Police Reform and Social Responsibility Act 2011 and associated Regulations to:
  - Review and report on the Commissioner's draft Police and Crime Plan; and
  - Review and report on the Commissioner's proposed level of precept.

In addition the Panel may:

- Make any recommendations on the draft plan or proposed precept; and
- By a two thirds majority, veto the proposed precept.

## **Draft refreshed Plan**

2. The Panel were provided with the Commissioner's draft refreshed Safer in Kent: The Community Safety and Justice Plan 2017-21 and budget, together with a report summarising consultation on the draft refreshed Plan and drawing attention to the changes from the previous version of the Plan. The report and Appendices also set out the Commissioner's reasons for a proposed increase in the precept of 7.6% and provided information about the medium term financial picture and use of reserves. The Commissioner's report included a report by the Commissioner's Chief Finance Officer.
3. The Panel noted that the Commissioner had consulted widely in preparing the draft refreshed Plan and noted that the feedback from consultation had been largely the same as last year. The Panel noted that the Commissioner had made a particular effort to involve minority communities in the consultation by visiting mosques and gurdwaras.

4. .The Panel noted that the priorities in the draft refreshed Plan were largely unchanged. The Panel noted that the priority around visible neighbourhood policing and effective roads policing had been amended to be more mindful of the need to protect vulnerable road users (e.g. cyclists, pedestrians and horse riders) and to place greater emphasis on the work to support bereaved families following fatal road traffic incidents. The Panel noted the planned recruitment of up to an additional 200 police officers would enhance the frontline and that the Chief Constable had committed to deploying a significant amount of the additional resource to support local policing.
5. The Panel asked what was meant by “denying use of the county’s road network to those intent on causing harm through criminality”. The Commissioner explained that it referred to positive roads policing successes such as the disruption of drug and weapons transport through the county and that he was keen to see greater use of Automatic Number Plate Recognition (ANPR) to support further improvements. **The Panel recommended that the Plan wording be amended at Section 5 to make this clearer.**
6. The Panel noted that the addition of words requiring Kent Police to deliver an ‘accessible’ service referred to planned improvements to the 101 call handling service as well as the development and implementation of an online reporting system. The Panel noted that an awareness campaign was planned to ensure the public understood all the methods for contacting the police. The Commissioner was asked to take note of equivalent work being undertaken in the Health Service and also to ensure that, if possible, a consistent approach be taken to the opening hours of police front counters.
7. The Panel noted the high priority given to child sexual exploitation in the Commissioner’s consultation and **recommended that it be mentioned more explicitly within the Plan priorities,**
8. The Panel were pleased to note the inclusion of “tackling inequality” within the leadership priority and offered to support the Commissioner in engaging with diverse communities in the future.
9. The Panel noted the clear references to support for victims of crime and witnesses but commented that many readers would only look at the “plan on a page”. To ensure the public were aware of the priority given to this area, **the Panel recommended that the Commissioner include a specific reference to support for witnesses in the “plan on a page”.**
10. The Panel noted that in addition to communication activity planned to help the public understand how to best contact the police, the recruitment of additional police staff would help improve call handling at the Force Control Room.
11. The Panel noted that work was taking place to improve diversionary schemes and improved custody protocols to prevent people being drawn unnecessarily into the

criminal justice system. The Panel noted the Commissioner's plans regarding a new scheme for veterans as a good example.

### **Proposed precept**

12. The Commissioner explained that he sought approval for an increase in the police precept of 7.6%, (equivalent to £12 per year for a Band D household). This was the maximum permitted without calling a referendum and the additional flexibility given by Government for police funding was the result of lobbying by Police and Crime Commissioners. The additional precept would raise £9.5m. The Panel noted the Commissioner's comment that the police precept in Kent would still be amongst the lowest.
13. The Commissioner explained that the additional funds would enable the Chief Constable to recruit up to an additional 200 officers and 84 police staff and would also enable the Chief Constable to maintain current PSCO numbers. The Commissioner stressed that he also expected the Force to become more efficient and to develop collaboration further (without significant impact on front-line policing) so the budget contained a requirement to make savings of £9.8m towards the medium-term financial challenge. The Commissioner also advised the Panel that he had reduced the costs of his office by £200k and that this was contributing to the overall savings requirement.
14. The Commissioner reassured the Panel that the consultation had shown support for an increase in the policing precept, providing that it resulted in positive work by Kent Police. He expected that the additional officers would reassure the public and offer good value for the extra money. The Panel asked the Commissioner to report back to the Panel at a future meeting on progress with the recruitment.
15. The Panel noted that the National Audit Office had advised that reserves of a minimum of 5% of revenue budget be maintained and that the Commissioner had plans to reduce reserves over the medium term. Some members expressed concern that a reduction of the reserves could lead to financial difficulties if there was unexpected expenditure but were advised by the Commissioner that, in his opinion and that of his Chief Finance Officer, the planned level of reserves was prudent, particularly in light of the fact that if a particular unplanned incident resulted in expenditure in excess of 1% of budget, Home Office financial assistance could be sought. The Panel noted the Commissioner's comment that one of the reasons why the request for financial support for Operation Stack had been refused was the level of reserves.
16. The Panel noted that the Commissioner had received assurances from the Chief Constable that the additional officers would be deployed to support local policing and 'hidden harm' crime, such as exploitation and abuse issues. The Panel noted that the Chief Constable would be held to account for progress on both recruitment and deployment at the Performance & Delivery Board. The Panel noted the Commissioner's view that focusing on Police Officer recruitment was the most appropriate use of the additional funds. The Panel sought and received an

assurance that the precept increase and the relevant spending plans, if agreed, would be communicated to the public in a variety of forums and using online communications.

17. The Panel noted that the Commissioner and the Chief Constable were giving thought to the potential for significant disruption at ports as a result of Brexit.
18. The Panel unanimously supported the proposed precept for 2018/19