

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 2019/20

Date: 6th February 2019

PANEL DECISIONS

The Panel supports the Commissioner's refreshed Safer in Kent plan.

The Panel approves the Commissioner's proposal to increase the police precept for 2019/20 by 14.2%.

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 and proposed Precept.

2. The Panel were provided with the Commissioner's draft refreshed Safer in Kent: The Community Safety and Justice Plan 2017-21 and budget and the Annual Policing Survey 2019 Report. The report and Appendices also set out the Commissioner's reasons for a proposed increase in the precept of 14.2% 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 Commissioner introduced and set out the minor changes to the Plan, the Panel noted that there had been minor wording changes, but the priorities and principles contained within the plan remained valid with strong ethics, integrity and honesty.

4. Members discussed the findings of the Annual Policing Survey, one member raised concerns that the plan and its minor amendments did not reflect the results of the public consultation. The Member asked the commissioner whether he intended a major rewrite of the plan on its next review. The Commissioner considered that the plan reflected what residents wanted to see action on, there was still a lot of misunderstanding about Police funding and it was hoped that the plan would improve future consultation responses and that people would feel like they were getting better value for money.

5. Referring to the question within the survey 'Tell us one thing you think Kent Police could do better' a Member suggested that the response 'Recruit more police officers and/or deploy more visible patrols' should be split into two, the Commissioner confirmed that he would consider this for future surveys.

6. In response to a question about what visible policing looked like in the modern world the Commissioner explained that the aim was for more police officers and PCSOs to be seen on the streets, including a greater number dedicated to town centres and local neighbourhoods.

7. In response to a comment about the types of crime Kent Police were dealing with the Commissioner explained that demands on policing had changed, there was an Investigation Management Unit dealing with investigations along with teams looking at specific areas such as Domestic Abuse to improve levels of service. Where Members were aware of areas of poor service the Commissioner encouraged them to tell him so that he could ensure this was being looked at and if there were wider issues, he could hold the Chief Constable to account.

8. A Member commented on crime prevention and diversion, asking what was available locally in terms of diversionary activities. The Commissioner explained that there was a commissioning strategy and he had given money to Community Safety Partnerships to enable them to make decisions about what was needed locally. The Safer in Kent Fund funded local projects focusing on prevention and diversion. Nationally, the Commissioner explained that during 2018 the Home Office had run an Early Intervention Youth Fund and that he hoped to be able to make an announcement next week about partnership work with the Home Office.

9. In response to a comment the Commissioner confirmed that burglary remained as one of his, and the Chief Constable's priorities. A Member congratulated the Commissioner on how policing was progressing in the county.

10. The Commissioner referred to the precept and thanked his team who had done an exceptional job in ensuring that the precept proposal was as accurate as possible. He also thanked the Panel for their engagement at both formal and informal meetings and other engagements. The Commissioner considered the Panel meetings to be important and he felt supported whilst being challenged appropriately.

11. The Commissioner had taken all feedback into consideration, and he thanked all Kent Police officers and staff (including volunteers) for the tremendous work carried out to keep Kent safe, they were to be commended.

12. Referring to the challenges, the Commissioner said the pressure and demands on Kent Police continued to increase, but he hoped that staff felt supported by his office. It was evident that crime was changing, there was more focus on online crime with more risks relating to vulnerable people, grooming, human trafficking, sexual violence, stalking and domestic abuse which counted for 1 in 6 crimes recorded by Kent Police. HMIC's latest State of Policing report highlighted that policing was becoming more complex.

13. Demands on policing had also changed, there had been a huge increase in calls relating to mental health issues and other vulnerabilities and missing persons. There were greater requirements around safeguarding and crime recording. Police officer and staff were under pressure with numbers falling every year from 2009 to 2016. This also had an impact on their welfare, with officers and staff taking time off for their own mental health and wellbeing.

14. Kent was in receipt of the 7th lowest amount of funding from central Government per head of population in the country, but in spite of all the challenges it was the only force rated 'Outstanding' by Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services (HMICFRS) for legitimacy three years in a row, was the best force in the country for crime recording accuracy – rated 'Outstanding' - and in all other areas of inspection was rated 'Good' or 'Outstanding'.

15. The Commissioner explained that the Government had allowed PCCs the flexibility to increase the police precept by up to £2 a month (Band D property). Based on the demands outlined and with the support of residents the Commissioner proposed to increase council tax by the maximum allowable amount of £2 per month for a Band D property. Kent Police would also be required to make £9.7m of efficiencies during the course of the next year. This would enable the Chief Constable to recruit a further 180 police officers (in addition to replacing those who left or retired), increasing the establishment to 3632 and bringing Kent Police back to 96% of its peak officer strength in 2009. In addition, it would enable the recruitment of 15 police staff and all 300 PCSO posts would be protected.

16. In response to a question about deployment the Commissioner confirmed that this was a decision for the Chief Constable, however this had been discussed and in general half of the new police officers would go into local policing roles and the other half into crime investigation teams.

17. Referring to the longer term, the next Comprehensive Spending Review needed to look at police funding, it was considered that the current division between central and local police funding was not sustainable.

18. The Commissioner offered to facilitate Panel Members visiting their local policing team who he said were doing a fantastic job.

19. A Member asked whether the Commissioner was satisfied that the additional funding should be spent on increasing police numbers and not for funding pension liabilities for example, the Member also asked how sustainable the Commissioner's proposals were. The Commissioner explained that the strategic assessment of Kent Police identified that capacity needed to be strengthened because of increasing demand and broader areas of criminality. Referring to long term sustainability the Commissioner advised that a 2% precept increase had been built into the budget for future years.

20. Referring to preventative services a Member asked whether the Commissioner had considered reducing the number of additional officers and using the money for Safer in Kent (SinK) Funding and putting into local communities. The Commissioner explained that although the SinK fund would not continue there would be funding for preventative

projects/schemes in addition to that provided to the Community Safety Partnerships. The Violence Reduction Challenge would be holding its final meeting on 13 February and the Commissioner would outline, in March, what would be a significant investment in preventative work from within existing resources.

21. A Member asked for more information on what the Commissioner meant by visible policing, and the Commissioner explained that the Chief Constable's intention with the additional 180 officers was: 86 into town centre beat policing and proactive Community Policing Teams, and 4 into the Citizens in Policing programme working alongside the special constabulary and volunteers. The remaining 90 would be going into Vulnerability Investigation Teams and the Crime Squad, as well as other areas to increase vulnerability investigation capacity. With regards to rural areas, the Commissioner said everybody would benefit from having greater proactive policing, but also in December the dedicated Rural Policing Team increased by 7 officers as well as a Rural Crime Coordinator.

22. In response to a query about running a publicity campaign alongside the precept announcement, the Commissioner said he was keen, and if the Panel supported the increase and it was possible, he would look to circulate a communication with the Council Tax bills and also run an awareness campaign on social media in the most cost effective and efficient way. The Commissioner was reminded that many district councils were due to have elections on 2 May and he should be mindful of the rules around Purdah.

23. A Member referred to the 7% 'other income' mentioned in the report and the Commissioner explained that this was where Kent Police re-charged for certain areas such as firearms licencing.

24. The Commissioner confirmed that the precept would fund 180 additional officers and 15 police staff. Regarding the welfare and mental health of officers the Commissioner explained that he hoped increasing the numbers sent a strong message and reduced the pressure on existing officers, meaning that victims continued to receive a good service and officers had more time to undertake proactive work. The Commissioner outlined some of the ways in which staff were supported and given guidance.

25. The Commissioner explained that he had taken on board all feedback and comments received by his office as well as the results of a poll published on the Kent online website. The Commissioner said that he would continue to hold regular meetings to challenge the Chief Constable on the impact of the additional officers.

26. Members congratulated the Commissioner on the Police Cadet scheme, adding that young people were being drawn from a wide variety of backgrounds and that it was proving very successful.

27. The Chairman confirmed that he was happy to support the Commissioner's plan and precept and he congratulated the Commissioner on behalf of the Panel on the high quality of work from Kent Police.

RESOLVED that the Panel support the Commissioner's refreshed Safer in Kent Plan and approve the accompanying precept.