

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, 4 February 2025.

PRESENT: Mr P M Hill, OBE (Chairman), Mr G Sandher (Vice-Chairman), Cllr M Blakemore, Mrs E Bolton, Cllr P Feacey, Cllr Mrs J Hollingsbee, Cllr S Jeffery, Cllr D Keers, Mr J Meade, Cllr S Mochrie-Cox, Cllr R Palmer and Cllr R Wells.

ALSO PRESENT: Mr Matthew Scott (Police and Crime Commissioner), Mr Tim Smith (Chief Constable), Mr David Paul (PCC's Chief Executive), Mr Neil Wickens (Head of Policy & Research, OPCC) and Mr Rob Phillips (PCC's Chief Finance Officer, OPCC).

IN ATTENDANCE: Mr Gaetano Romagnuolo (Scrutiny Research Officer).

UNRESTRICTED ITEMS

129. Introduction/Webcast Announcement

(Item 1)

130. Apologies and Substitutes

(Item 2)

Apologies were received from Cllr Perry Cole, Mr Ian Chittenden, Cllr Eddie Peake, Cllr Charlotte Zosseder and Cllr Nolan.

131. Declarations of Interests by Members in Items on the Agenda for this Meeting

(Item 3)

Councillor Feacey confirmed that he was the Chairman of the Ashford Volunteer Centre.

132. (Minutes of the Police and Crime Panel held on 18 December 2024

Item 4)

RESOLVED Members agreed that the minutes of the meeting which took place on the 18 December 2024 were an accurate record and a paper copy be signed by the Chairman.

133. Appointment of Chief Constable

(Item B1)

1. This was an additional item which was included at the request of the Police and Crime Commissioner, Mr Matthew Scott.
2. Mr Scott presented the item and some of the key highlights included the following:

- a) The Chief Constable, Mr Tim Smith, was required to obtain the Police and Crime Commissioner's permission to participate in the 'Retire and Rejoin' Scheme. The Police and Crime Commissioner set out his reasons for supporting Mr Smith's application to participate in the Scheme in the report provided to the Panel.
 - b) For the purpose of reassurance to the Panel, it was explained that the Retire and Rejoin Scheme was open to all police officers in England and Wales and designed to retain skills, knowledge and experience within the police service at all ranks. It had been recognised by the former Minister of State for Crime, Policing and Fire. The position was also supported by other national bodies, including the NPCC, APCC, College of Policing and the Chief Police Officers' Staff Association.
 - c) Mr Scott explained to Members that the current advice from the Home Office required the appointment to be treated as a new appointment, falling within the scope of the Police Reform and Social Responsibility Act 2011 (PRSRA).
 - d) If successful in his appointment, Mr Smith would retire on the 28 February and then rejoin on 1 April 2025 with his pension abated. He would be issued with a new term of appointment which would commence on 1 April 2025 and cease on 7 December 2029, to ensure his overall term in post did not exceed the mandated 7 years. Deputy Chief Constable Mr Peter Ayling would be appointed Temporary Chief Constable for the period 28 February to 1 April 2025.
 - e) It was reconfirmed to the Panel that they had a statutory duty, under the Police Reform and Social Responsibility Act 2011 to: review the appointment of the Chief Constable in the same way as if it was a first-time appointment; make a recommendation on the proposed appointment; or, if two thirds of the Panel indicated they were not in favour, veto the appointment.
3. In answer to questions and comments, the following was stated:
- a) The appointment of Mr Ayling to cover the period of time Chief Constable Smith was absent, would generate a cost to the force. However, it was not envisaged to be a significant sum. It was further clarified that there would be an ongoing diminishing cost, due to the Chief Constable's pension being abated.
 - b) It was confirmed that the Police and Crime Commissioner was able to remove the Chief Constable before his term of office ended in December 2029, and that the Chief Constable could retire before this time. The notice period was three months.
 - c) It was confirmed that the scheme was open to any officer within Kent Police. Succession planning had been considered throughout all areas, although it was acknowledged that the selection of Chief Officers was a national process.

4. RESOLVED the Panel were unanimous in their recommendation that the Commissioner appoint Mr Smith as Chief Constable of Kent Police.

134. Draft Police and Crime Plan and 2025-26 Precept Proposal
(Item B2)

1. The report was presented by the Police Crime and Commissioner, Mr Matthew Scott.
2. Mr Scott took the Panel through the draft Police and Crime Plan and expanded on the key areas of focus, as well as the survey responses from members of the community. In answer to questions and comments, the following was said:
 - a) Mr Scott confirmed that he would look to include more free text analysis in next year's survey. The statistics gathered from the surveys would enable data to be pulled out from each question.
 - b) The Panel noted that the Commissioner's new plan set out a framework for delivering his manifesto commitments. The priorities centred around four key areas:
 - Protecting People
 - Protecting Places
 - Protecting Property
 - Productive Partnerships
 - c) The individual areas included in the Police and Crime Plan maintained a focus on national and local policing issues, including knife crime. The County Lines Team were working to issue warrants to tackle gangs and violent crime. Other teams continued to use Stop and Search powers with positive outcomes. The Violence Reduction Unit had played a key role in reducing violent crime.
 - d) Other successful strategies which had been utilised to reduce knife crime in the community included ongoing talks with local schools through the St Giles Trust, and engagement with Pupil Referral Units.
 - e) The Panel considered that the Plan could be amended and suggested adding more emphasis to the issue of knife crime. It was also suggested that collaborative work with the voluntary sector and faith organisations could be made more explicit.
 - f) It was confirmed that the Chief Constable would work with Corporate Communications to develop a social media strategy to publicise good practice initiatives which had taken place within the community.
 - g) Mr Scott highlighted the inconsistencies around decision making between Police forces. Delays with the Criminal Courts and Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) were also issues outside the Police remit; this was an aspect that some members of the community were not aware of.

- h) Several organisations and services, such as the Business Improvement District, Street Ambassadors, the Maidstone Task Force and the local Community Safety Partnership, were working to improve residents' safety in Maidstone. Although they were achieving positive results, it was acknowledged that further work was required.
 - j) In response to the Panel's questions about the proposed precept, the Commissioner advised of his intention to increase the precept by £14 a year - or 5.5% for an average Band D property. This was the maximum allowed under the Referendum principles.
 - k) The Commissioner explained that he was aware of current cost-of-living pressures on Kent residents. However, the increase was essential in order to mitigate the Force's funding pressures. Without it, significant additional savings would be required; this would risk jeopardising the strong performance achieved by Kent Police.
3. The Kent and Medway Police and Crime Panel supported the Commissioner's Cut Crime, Support Victims, Build Trust: Kent Police and Crime Plan 2025-2029, and asked that the Commissioner consider the comments and suggestions made.
 4. The Panel unanimously approved the Police and Crime Plan, and the Commissioner's proposal to increase the police precept for 2025/26 by £14 per year (or 5.5%) to £270.15 for an average Band D property.

135. HMICFRS PEEL 2023-25 - An Inspection of Kent Police
(Item B3)

1. The report was presented by Mr Scott. Some of the key points highlighted to the Panel were as follows:
 - a) Progress had been made since the inspection, particularly in the areas of public call handling, and serious and organised crime.
 - b) The Force had conducted intelligence work to re-profile county lines and gangs, and now had a much better understanding of who they are, what they are doing and where they are operating.
 - c) It had been indicated that Kent was going to be one of the early forces to be inspected under the PEEL 2025-27 inspection regime. Work was expected to start in the summer. A draft of HMICFRS' new assessment framework had been received, including what they considered 'Good' which was helpful.
2. The Kent and Medway Police and Crime Panel noted the report. Since the next inspection was expected to start in the summer, it was agreed that a verbal update would be provided at the October 2025 meeting.

136. Questions to the Commissioner

(Item C1)

1. In reply to a question about Immediate Justice and initiatives aimed at deterring and punishing antisocial behaviour, Mr Scott said he would need to look at the funding received over the next 12 months, but it was something he was committed to and there were opportunities. In the meantime, the Force was looking at what out-of-court resolutions could be used proportionately as well as the new cautions regime incorporating conditional and community cautions. Collaboration with the Probation Service continued in order to support rehabilitation.
2. The Kent and Medway Police and Crime Panel noted the response to the question.

137. Future work programme

(Item D1)

1. The Panel noted the Work Programme. The next meeting was scheduled for the 4 June 2025 (then postponed to 16 July 2025).