

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 Wednesday, 1 February 2023.

PRESENT: Mr P M Hill, OBE (Chairman), Mrs E Bolton, Cllr P Feacey, Cllr G Hackwell, Cllr Mrs J Hollingsbee, Mr M A J Hood, Mr E Jayes (Substitute for Cllr R Palmer), Cllr D Keers, Cllr S Mochrie-Cox, Cllr L Parfitt-Reid, Cllr H Tejan and Cllr R Wells

ALSO PRESENT: Mr M Scott (Kent Police and Crime Commissioner), Mr A Harper (PCC's Chief Executive) and Mr R Phillips (PCC's Chief Finance Officer)

IN ATTENDANCE: Mr M Dentten (Democratic Services Officer) and Mrs A Taylor (Scrutiny Research Officer)

UNRESTRICTED ITEMS

73. Declarations of Interests by Members in Items on the Agenda for this Meeting *(Item 3)*

No declarations were made.

74. Minutes of the Police and Crime Panel held on 6 December 2022 *(Item 4)*

RESOLVED that, subject to the removal of Mr Harper and Mr Phillips as attendees, the minutes of the meeting held on 6 December 2022 were an accurate record and that they be signed by the Chairman.

75. Draft refreshed Police and Crime Plan and 2023/24 precept proposal *(Item A1)*

1. The Panel received a report which detailed the Commissioner's refreshed 'Making Kent Safer' Police and Crime Plan and proposal to increase the policing precept in 2023/24 to £243.15 for an average Band D property, which represented an increase of £15 per year, or 6.57%, on the 2022/23 precept.
2. The Commissioner introduced his refreshed Police and Crime Plan. He informed the Panel that his seven priorities for Kent Police, to: work with residents, communities and businesses to prevent crime and antisocial behaviour; tackle violence against women and girls; protect people from exploitation and abuse; combat organised crime and county lines; be visible and responsive to the needs of communities; prevent road danger and support Vision Zero; and protect young people and provide opportunities, remained unchanged. He noted that the priorities remained relevant and continued to

have broad public support. It was explained that the minor amendments to the Plan took account of new national policing requirements. Concerning the results of his Annual Policing Survey, the Commissioner noted that the number of respondents was consistent with previous years, that 52% of respondents stated they were in favour of paying more council tax to support policing, and committed to closely monitor victim satisfaction, including through the new victim support contract which would commence in April 2023 and include an independent victim satisfaction survey. He compared crime statistics for 2022 with pre-pandemic (2018) performance, highlighting an 8% fall in crime. In relation to the tackling of county lines, he noted that previous precept increases had allowed for the formation of a dedicated team which had greatly reduced the number of active county lines in Kent from a high of 82 in July 2020 to below 40. The success of the mini cadet and senior cadet programme across the county were highlighted. The challenges for the coming year were addressed and included Force Control Room service levels and responding to the findings of the HMICFRS PEEL report.

3. The Commissioner explained his precept proposal, confirming the proposed increase for 2023/24. He thanked the Panel for its engagement and assured Members that the requested level of information, especially on pressures and how funds would be spent to address performance challenges, were detailed in the report. He stated that an underspend was expected for the 2022/23 financial year and that the general reserve would remain at 3% of the net revenue budget, in line with the Chief Financial Officer's general contingency strategy. The progress of building and digital transformation projects were addressed, with it noted that many of the former were on track to be finished by the end of the financial year and that the later had been completed. The successful funding bids made and monies received over the previous year, including Safer Streets funding, were highlighted. In relation to police officer recruitment, he assured Members that the force was on track to meet its March 2023 target, with February 2023 planned to be the largest intake on record. Regarding cost pressures he explained that they stood at £34m and taking account of the level of reserves presented a significant challenge with a £14.1m funding gap predicted. He added that no additional funding had been promised by government to support long term staff and officers costs related to the Police Uplift Programme and that there was no flexibility on police numbers for coming year. The Panel were told that the core funding grant from government had increased by £700,000, which would not measurably alleviate the anticipated cost pressures for the coming year. Members' attention was drawn to the savings plan contained in Appendix C to the report. It was noted that anticipated funding gaps were not unique to Kent, with Sussex Police, among others, forecasting a £17m gap. The Commissioner reassured the Panel that all savings would be handled sensitively. He explained that the impact of savings on the public, service and staff would be his three focuses when reviewing savings proposals. He concluded by drawing Members' attention to the expenditure on the Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner, which remained at 0.4% of the policing budget, whilst delivering additional responsibilities.

4. Members thanked the Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner for their budget briefings to the Panel in November 2022 and January 2023.
5. The Panel reiterated its support for the Commissioner's continued inclusion of 'tackling violence against women and girls' as a priority within his Police and Crime Plan.
6. A Member asked that the late-night levy, which the Home Office were consulting on, be investigated as way of increasing the force's income.
7. The Panel recognised that the current funding formula continued to adversely impact Kent and that government's funding settlement for 2023/24 was disappointing. Following the Panel's comments, the Commissioner stated that Kent Police was the 6th lowest funded force per head of population and in the lower quartile of precepts nationally. It was noted that an increase in the policing precept was required to compensate for a lack of national funding. He added that there had been a series of successes in securing Special Grant Funding, including during the EU Exit transition period, and informed Members that he had written to the Chancellor of the Exchequer in November 2022 ahead of the comprehensive spending review.
8. Responding to comments from the Panel, the Commissioner stated that granting PCCs a General Powers of Competence, as part of the Home Office's Police and Crime Commissioner Review, would provide additional options for revenue generation.
9. The Commissioner agreed to provide a comprehensive update to the Panel on the neighbourhood policing review, at the appropriate time. He noted that it was not currently appropriate as staff consultation had recently concluded and the final proposal was still in development.
10. In response to a question from a Member, the Commissioner explained that a significant reduction in the number of Section 136 detentions had saved Kent Police considerable resources. He informed the Panel that Kent alongside Humberside were considered the leading forces nationally, in terms of handling mental health.
11. Following a question from a Member, the Commissioner committed to continue pursuing and vocally campaigning for further and fairer funding for Kent Police. It was noted that a considerable funding discrepancy between Kent and London remained, which did not fully take account of the spill over of crime from the capital.
12. A Member highlighted victim dissatisfaction with Kent Police, which stood at 49.4%, as indicated in the results of the Commissioner's Annual Policing Survey. The Commissioner noted that insufficient follow up contact, Crown Prosecution Service not charging as well as undesired outcomes were the most consistent causes for dissatisfaction. He emphasised the importance of empowering victims through the Code of Practice for Victims of Crime, in order

to ensure full compliance. He provided further reassurance that he would hold the Chief Constable to account for the treatment of victims and pledged to improve victim satisfaction.

13. The Chair reminded the Commissioner of the Panel's disappointment at the poor performance highlighted by the HMICFRS PEEL report into Kent Police and asked him whether he was confident that the Chief Constable would have sufficient resources to regain strong performance. The Commissioner assured the Panel that he was confident that the Chief Constable would have sufficient resources to deliver the required improvements, subject to the approval of his precept proposal.
14. Following a question from a Member on the value of the predicted underspend and resilience of reserves, the Commissioner confirmed that a £1.5m underspend was anticipated and would be used to offset costs in the forthcoming financial year. Regarding reserves, he confirmed that he had maintained a position of preserving a general reserve equivalent to 3% of annual expenditure, which stood at £20.9m. He noted the importance of a general reserve of that size in the event of unforeseen circumstances, including large scale investigations and crises. Concerning the risk reserve he explained that it functioned to cover insurance costs, whilst the capital reserve related to budgeted projects.

RESOLVED that the proposed refreshed Police and Crime Plan and Precept be approved.

76. Contacting Kent Police

(Item B1)

1. The Panel were presented with a report which provided a comprehensive summary of how best the public could contact Kent Police; the structure of the Force Control Room; emergency (999), non-emergency (101) and digital contact performance between 2019-2022; and the measures used by the Commissioner to hold the Chief Constable to account on performance.
2. The Chair introduced the item and reminded Members that the report had been requested following continued monitoring of 101 call handling performance and concerns that further improvement was required to regain prior strong performance and provide the public with a responsive and reliable means of contacting Kent Police.
3. The Commissioner gave a verbal overview of the report, which included coverage of the broad range of contact methods and trends. He encouraged the use of Crimestoppers, which was utilised by Kent Police. He explained that a significant recruitment drive was underway, which would directly lead to an increase in 101 call handlers and improved performance, with it noted that the latest intake had occurred 3 weeks prior to the meeting with further intakes to come. Concerning the posting of police officers into the Force Control Room, the Commissioner noted that 6-month deployments had been in place as a temporary measure and emphasised the benefits of the experience and skills

exchange for Force Control Room staff as well as response teams and other officers working across the county which would improve force cohesion. It was added that supervisor ratios, exit interviews and shift patterns were under review. Regarding call attrition, which took account of unanswered calls, he explained that there had been a reduction from a peak of 59% in October 2022 to 16.25% in January 2023, with further work required to improve the force's standing nationally. He reminded the Panel that he received weekly performance updates on the issue from the Chief Constable and had visited the Force Control Room on multiple occasions witnessing strong performance.

4. Following a question from a Member, the Commissioner explained that 999 should be used to report a crime in progress and agreed to clarify public messaging on the issue.
5. In response to a question from a Member on the measures in place to ensure a positive working culture, the Commissioner noted that the Force Control Room had a Culture Board and that he had not been alerted to any cultural concerns. He reminded the Panel that staff in the Force Control Room were often the force's first point of contact with the public and that morale, pay and retention were among his key considerations.
6. Concerning Force Control Room vacancy levels, a Member asked what had caused the significant increase and whether staff were placed in division pods based on their local knowledge. The Commissioner explained that post-pandemic mass recruitment campaigns by many industries had been a major factor in the higher vacancy rate. He added that many staff also left to become police officers and emphasised the importance of a handover of expertise. He confirmed that staff were not placed in pods based on local knowledge and encouraged members of the public to use what3words which was used by the force as a means of pinpointing the location of reports.
7. A Member asked whether best practice had been sought from other public and private sectors bodies. They suggested that different approaches to attracting and retaining staff should be considered in order to provide greater long-term service resilience, home working arrangements were given as an example. The Commissioner reassured the Panel that private sector resources and forecasting were utilised, with public and private sector experts working directly with the force. He gave the previous matching of police staff pay increases with officer pay increases as an example of Kent Police's enhanced pay offer for staff in the Force Control Room, though noted that pay remained an ongoing issue. Concerning home working, he confirmed that it was being investigated, noting that an integrated force control room system was in the process of being commissioned and stressed that ensuring appropriate safeguards were in place was vital to any changes in working arrangements.

RESOLVED to note the report and request a further update at the Panel's September 2023 meeting.

77. Decision OPCC.D.032.23 - Kent Victim's Advocacy and Support Service - Contract Award
(Item C1)

RESOLVED to note the decision.

78. Questions to the Commissioner
(Item D1)

Question 1

The Prime Minister described David Carrick's behaviour as a 'truly sickening' abuse of power and stated that the police 'must address the failings of the case, restore public confidence and ensure the safety of women and girls'. The Home Secretary described Carrick's 'sickening crimes' being 'a stain on the police' and has asked all police forces to check police officers and staff against the national databases to identify those who are not fit to serve in the police service.

Can the Commissioner inform the Panel as to what actions he is taking to hold the Chief Constable to account on addressing the failings of this case, restoring public confidence and ensuring the safety of women and girls?

(Mrs Elaine Bolton, Independent Member)

1. The Commissioner responded to the question by condemning the sickening and totally unacceptable behaviour of David Carrick, commending the justice system for holding him to account for his crimes. He noted that vetting and standards remained challenges for policing and that he had discussed with the Chief Constable the measures Kent Police had and would be putting in place to ensure that processes were robust. He added that a report on vetting and standards would be presented to his Performance and Delivery Board. Regarding the measures at his disposal concerning disgraced officers, the Commissioner explained that he had the power to apply to forfeit the public funded portion of their pension, if their crime was committed whilst exercising their duties as a police officer. He agreed to provide the Panel with further information on vetting, standards and forfeiture at a future meeting.

Question 2

In his role in holding the Chief Constable to account can the Commissioner comment on victim and community feedback on investigations, charging, prosecuting and justice to help ensure that all those affected by crime or anti-social behaviour perceived crime have confidence in Kent Police and the justice system to deal with this in full?

(Cllr Shane Mochrie-Cox, Gravesham Borough Council)

2. The Commissioner stated that ensuring that residents, especially those who had provided evidence, received adequate support, were effectively corresponded with and had confidence in the force were priorities. He reminded the Panel that Kent Police had a duty to comply with the Code of Practice for Victims of Crime and gave assurance that he would be holding the Chief Constable to account on victim and community feedback at a forthcoming meeting of his Performance and Delivery Board.

RESOLVED to note the responses to the questions.

79. Future work programme
(Item E1)

RESOLVED to note the report.