

KENT COUNTY COUNCIL

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 Thursday, 10 October 2024.

PRESENT: Mr M Hill OBE (Chairman), Mr G Sandher MBE (Vice-Chairman), Cllr M Blakemore, Mrs E Bolton, Mr I Chittenden, Cllr P Cole, Cllr P Feacey, Mrs S Hohler, Cllr Mrs J Hollingsbee, Cllr S Jeffery, Cllr S Mochrie-Cox, Cllr C Nolan and Cllr R Palmer.

ALSO PRESENT: Mr M Scott (Kent Police and Crime Commissioner), Mr A Harper (PCC's Chief Executive), Mr D Paul (PCC's proposed Chief Executive), Mr R Phillips (PCC's Chief Finance Officer, OPCC), Mr N Wickens (Head of Policy Coordination & Research, OPCC) and Ms L Steward (Head of Standards & Regulation, OPCC).

IN ATTENDANCE: Mr G Romagnuolo (Research Officer – Overview and Scrutiny).

UNRESTRICTED ITEMS

128. Introduction/Webcast Announcement

(Item A1)

129. Apologies and Substitutes

(Item A2)

1. The Chairman extended his welcome to new members of the Kent and Medway Police and Crime Panel (Cllr Eddie Peake, Cllr Astra Birch, Cllr Stuart Jeffery and Cllr Teresa Murray).
2. Apologies were received from Cllr Des Keers, Cllr Charlotte Zosseder, Cllr Teresa Murray, Cllr Richard Wells and Mr Meade. Mrs Sarah Hohler substituted for Mr Jordan Meade.

130. Declarations of Interest by Members in Items on the Agenda

(Item A3)

1. Mr Feacey declared that he was Chairman of Ashford Volunteer Centre and did volunteering for the Lord Lieutenant of Kent.
2. Mr Mochrie-Cox declared that he was Vice-Chair of the Board of The Grand - a youth project in Gravesham.

131. Minutes of the Police and Crime Panel held on 16 July 2024

(Item A4)

1. A Member of the Panel asked when the Commissioner would provide his response to a question about how representative the Neighbourhood Policing model was in terms of the communities that the police officers and staff were serving.

a. The Commissioner said that he would provide this information in his update at the Panel's meeting on 18 December 2024.

RESOLVED: that the minutes of the meeting held on 16 July 2024 were an accurate record.

132. Kent Police and Crime Commissioner's Chief Executive - Confirmation Hearing *(Item A5)*

1. The Commissioner expressed his gratitude to Mr Harper (PCC's Chief Executive) for having supported him for over eight years, and for having worked at the Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner (OPCC) for even longer, prior to the Commissioner's appointment. Mr Harper was due to retire after 41 years of service in organisations including the Metropolitan Police, Surrey Police, Kent Police, and the Office of the Kent Police and Crime Commissioner.
2. The Commissioner introduced his report, which described the recruitment process in detail and included information on the number of applications, the panel that considered those applications and the selection process.
3. The Commissioner said that, at the conclusion of the selection process, he proposed to appoint Mr David Paul. His decision was unanimously supported by the recruitment panel.
4. The Commissioner explained that, in addition to the members of the recruitment panel, an Independent Member, Ms Caroline Wells, and a member of the PCC's senior management team, were also present. This was to ensure that the process was fair and professional. Ms Wells had an extensive background in dispute resolution and professional mediation in both the public and private sector.
5. A Member of the Panel asked Mr Paul to provide details in relation to his background. The background information supplied by Mr Paul (PCC's proposed Chief Executive) included:
 - His extensive experience in policing, including as Assistant Chief Officer for South-East Forces, leading on technology enabled transformation.
 - Assistant Chief Officer with the National Police Chiefs' Council on Pay and Workforce issues; and Programme Director with the Metropolitan Police.
 - His work with Central Government, across a range of Cabinet Office posts, including Chief of Staff for the Prime Minister's Strategy Unit.
 - His experience in working across the criminal justice system, and establishing effective relationships with a wide range of partners.

- His track record in delivering savings.
 - His broad experience across HR, IT strategy and development, management consultancy and collaboration.
6. When asked about his priorities as PCC Chief Executive, Mr Paul said that a key task was to help the Commissioner make sure that the priorities of his Police and Crime Plan were delivered. This included working with partner agencies in order to reduce crime, support victims and build trust in Kent Police.
 7. In reply to a question, Mr Paul said that another key aim was to work with all the relevant organisations to deliver an efficient and effective Criminal Justice System, as this was not solely the responsibility of Kent Police. A concerted effort would ensure that a victim's journey through the system was as swift and smooth as possible. It also meant that vulnerable people – such as those suffering from mental ill health – would receive the right support from the most appropriate agency.
 8. The Chairman thanked Mr Harper on behalf of the Panel for his excellent contribution to the work of the OPCC and gave him his very best wishes for the future.

RESOLVED: to **support** the appointment of Mr David Paul as the Kent Police and Crime Commissioner's Chief Executive.

133. Complaints against the Commissioner - Annual Report 2023-24
(Item B1)

1. Mr G Romagnuolo (Research Officer – Overview and Scrutiny) introduced the report and said that the data showed a general decrease in the number of recorded complaints made against the Kent Commissioner. Information from other panels suggested that the number of complaints (recorded or otherwise) against the Kent Commissioner was within the average range when compared with other Commissioners.
2. A Panel Member asked whether there was a common thread linking all the complaints.
 - a. Mr A Harper (PCC's Chief Executive) said that the complaints invariably did not relate to the Commissioner's personal conduct.

RESOLVED: To **note** the contents of the report.

134. Police and Crime Commissioner's Annual Report for 2023-24
(Item B2)

1. The Commissioner thanked his staff at the OPCC for their efficiency and hard work. In particular, he thanked Mr Wickens (Head of Policy Coordination & Research, OPCC) for producing his annual reports to a high standard.

2. The Commissioner introduced the report, which he broke down into four key areas: Holding to Account, Finance, Victim Services, and Partnerships.
3. With regard to the first area - Holding to Account – the Commissioner provided examples where accountability was key. For instance, steps were taken to improve the performance of the Force's Control Room, as non-emergency call handling performance deteriorated, with an increase in unanswered calls and the time callers were waiting. The Force took immediate action to address this issue, and developed a longer term programme of strategic transformation. Two years later, performance in this area had become one of the best in the country.
4. In terms of Finance, yet another balanced budget was delivered last financial year. This enabled maintenance of the previous year's Kent Police uplift allocation. Additional funding was secured for victim services, while the savings plan was mostly achieved.
5. The victim support funding received from the Ministry of Justice and the Home Office was an example of where Police and Crime Commissioners could have an influence on supporting victims and making communities safer. During the course of last year alone, victim services supported over 100,000 people.
6. Part of the additional funding was used to employ independent domestic abuse and sexual violence advisors; this helped an additional 7,000 people who had been victims of domestic abuse and sexual violence. The Catch 22 initiative - helped 168 young people at risk of crime exploitation, such as county lines.
7. The Commissioner praised the work of victim services, including those working with victims of domestic violence and homicide, those offering legal advice and those supporting families who lost loved ones in road accidents.
8. In terms of partnership and prevention, the Commissioner praised the multiagency work of the Violence Reduction Unit (VRU), which brought together local authorities, the police and other organisations. In 2023 alone, the support offered by the VRU to young people contributed to a decrease in knife-related injuries of 20%.
9. Partnership work through the Criminal Justice Board was continuing to address the backlog of outstanding caseloads in both Magistrates and Crown Courts. While Kent Police, the Crown Prosecution Service, the courts and the Probation Service were working hard to resolve this issue, there were still challenges in terms of staff capacity, particularly with regard to judicial posts.
10. The Chairman expressed concern over the reduction of Police Community Support Officers (PCSOs) and the coverage of the officers in the model.
 - a. The Commissioner explained that the number of officers would remain the same; the vacant PCSO posts would be replaced by additional Police Constables. Every Ward would have a named Police Officer. A higher proportion of resources would be owned at District level and

each Kent District was able to decide the allocation and coverage of their officers.

11. In reply to a question about preventative work in schools, the Commissioner talked about the Young Peoples Prevention Service. It provided age-appropriate messages to young people to help them make better informed choices and keep themselves and others safe. The service was delivered by two providers: Collaborate Digital - which focused on healthy relationships and cyber safety - and St Giles Trust – which focused on the dangers associated with gangs, county lines, knife crime and criminal exploitation.
12. In response to a question about what service improvements an annual increase in the precept would result in, the Commissioner said that he hoped to see an improvement in criminal justice outcomes, the quality of investigations and the visibility of officers.
13. A Panel member asked whether it might be helpful to investigate the possibility of consolidating some of the funding for young people’s preventative services, as this could avoid some duplication and promote a more efficient allocation of resources.
 - a. The Commissioner said that, hopefully, there would be funding for the VRU next year so that some of those projects could continue. He thought that the use of his own internal commissioning budget for the Gangs and County Lines Service, as well as the Young People's Prevention Service, worked well. The challenge was the increasing competition for fewer and fewer funding streams - hence increasing partnership work would be crucial in the future.
 - b. The Crime Reduction Grant was allocated directly to local authorities. There was some flexibility in how it could be used, as long as it met the priorities set out in his Police and Crime Plan.
14. In response to a question about the approach of Kent Police to the recent public protests, the Commissioner said the Force displayed an effective and strong response. The engagement with the local community was an important element; it involved not just Police Officers, but also Community Liaison Officers, whose presence provided reassurance.
15. Effective and accurate media communication and information was crucial. False and inaccurate media information that caused public anxiety was becoming an increasing problem. Collaboration between the police, local authorities and partner organisations was key to rapidly countering this type of misinformation.
16. In reply to a question about the increase in the recorded possession of cannabis, the Commissioner said that this could be partly linked to an increase in police Stop and Search activity.

17.A Panel member asked whether the decrease in knife crime was part of a longer term trend.

- a. The Commissioner confirmed that this was the case because there had been a consistent reduction in knife-related injuries in the past few years.

18.A Panel member asked to what extent the Commissioner's Office interacted with Kent Police to ensure that sentences which were considered to be unduly lenient were challenged.

- a. The Commissioner said that there was a mechanism in place whereby, when appropriate, he could raise the leniency of a sentence with Kent Police, and if they agreed, in certain circumstances they would approach the CPS. However, it was not a procedure that had been used often.

RESOLVED: To **review** and **comment** on the Annual Report.

135. HMICFRS PEEL 2023-25 Inspection - Update *(Item B3)*

1. The Commissioner provided an overview of Kent Police's HMICFRS PEEL 202325 Inspection. He reported that there had been internal and external validation of progress against a number of assessment areas. Three Areas for Improvement (AFIs) were recently reviewed and closed because of the positive progress in performance of the Force's Control Room.
2. The Force also self-assessed two AFIs as "discharged". These were: the development of serious organised crime (SOC) local profiles and; the introduction of a disproportionality panel to monitor and respond to vetting decisions. Work on the remaining 10 AFIs continued, with broad workstreams for each.
3. The Commissioner said that two areas – and Investigating Crime in particular - were graded as "Requires Improvement". Nonetheless, the current charge rate for victim-based crime for the rolling year was over three percentage points above that referenced in the PEEL report which demonstrates that the Force was moving in a positive direction.
4. Repeat domestic abuse offenders were targeted by proactive teams who worked closely with partner organisations to reduce offending and break the cycle of abuse. Work continued to ensure that stalking protective orders were considered when appropriate. Kent Police made significant use of stalking protection orders as a method of supporting victims of crime.
5. In reply to a question about what initiatives had been undertaken to improve the investigation of crime, the Commissioner said the establishment of victim-based crime teams within each Kent district was key. They targeted more of those investigations which may have been closed too quickly in the past.

6. The Chairman thanked the Commissioner and welcomed the report.

RESOLVED: To **note** the report and **agree** to a further update at the February 2025 meeting.

136. Verbal Update from the Commissioner

(Item C1)

1. The Commissioner reported the establishment of a new Retail Crime Board which sought the views of major retailers as well as representatives of smaller retailer organisations in order to understand the challenges that they were experiencing with regard to shop theft and assault on their staff. The Force recorded 15,500 shoplifting offences in the last 12 months. The Commissioner said that he intended to ask retailers to supply some of their internal data about theft to build a clearer picture of this issue.
2. The Rural Crime Board held its inaugural meeting the week before. It brought together the police, rural businesses, their representative organizations and the OPCC. The Crime Rural Advisory Group had not met for a number of years, and the rural community wanted greater opportunities for engagement with the OPCC and the force. Therefore, it was decided that the Rural Crime Board would be the most appropriate arena. Key conversations focused on fly tipping.
3. The Commissioner said that, this financial year, he offered a small amount of funding in order to tackle crime in rural communities. There would be operations to deliver enhanced targeted visibility in rural areas and to disrupt theft of stolen plant and machinery.
4. The Annual Policing Survey was recently launched. Over 3,500 responses were received in the first two weeks. The results would feed into the development of the Police and Crime Plan for next year. A youth survey was going to be launched imminently. It covered the areas of online safety, smartphones and social media.
5. The Commissioner provided a brief update on emergency and non-emergency call handling. Kent Police continued to improve its public call-handling performance, with its national ranking for 999 calls answered in under 10 seconds improving from 30th in August 2023, to 1st in August 2024.
6. The Commissioner advised that both himself and the Chief Constable had held separate briefings with the new intake of MPs.

RESOLVED: To **note** the verbal update.

137. Questions to the Commissioner

(Item C2)

1. Our High Streets and rural areas are being plagued with an ever-increasing number of complaints from residents about anti-social behaviour (ASB). How

is the Kent Police and Crime Commissioner (PCC) holding Kent's Chief Constable to account on these residents' concerns about ASB? What are the PCC and Chief Constable doing to tackle the many hotspots in our towns and villages with people committing ASB with apparent impunity?

(Cllr Richard Palmer, Swale Borough Council)

1. The Commissioner replied that, from a policing perspective, anti-social behaviour was a priority. He reported that, from the April 2024 to September 2024, ASB had decreased by 8.1% compared to the year before. However, this figure did not include anti-social behaviour which was reported to the local authority or to housing associations. In order to tackle ASB and serious violence hotspots in towns and villages, 27 locations had already been identified and targeted.
2. Across the Borough of Maidstone, we are feeling an increase in reckless driving, speeding and a flouting of traffic restrictions and laws - yet there seems to be a dearth of enforcement. In addition, we have seen significant anti-social behaviour on the river with wildlife being shot and river users abused.

Motorist abuse of pedestrianised and public transport lanes in the town centre, such as Week Street and the High Street, has also become routine. Off-road motorcycle and quad bike use in rural areas where motorised transport is not permitted, such as Pilgrims Way, happens regularly, with the individuals involved using threatening behaviour towards families who get in their way. The use of anti-social off-road vehicles in urban areas has been curbed slightly but the problem remains in many places.

How is the PCC holding the Chief Constable to account for tackling ASB across the Borough?

(Councillor Stuart Jeffery, Maidstone Borough Council)

1. The Commissioner said that, with regard to the enforcement of traffic restrictions and laws, partnership work was key. As pointed out in his annual report, there was an increase in enforcement across the 'fatal four' - distracted driving, drink and drug driving, seat belts and speed.
2. With regard to specific roads policing, there currently were a significant number of roads policing officers, proactive tasking team, a Road Safety unit, as well as the support of Beat Officers with speed cameras and localized targeted enforcement. In the Maidstone Borough, police officers and the Roads Policing Unit patrolled the area and issued community protection warnings to the drivers of overweight vehicles that did not meet legal vehicle regulations. In addition, 12 community

protection warnings were issued to off-road vehicles in the Parkwood and Shepway areas of Maidstone, and 76 e-scooters had been seized. The number of calls to Kent Police from those wards had fallen from 81 in April and May 2024 down to 39 in June and July 2024.

3. Could the Commissioner provide an update on the joint pilot road scheme he is running with Kent Police on road safety? How successful has the pilot been? When will it be rolled out to other areas, such as Folkestone & Hythe?

(Councillor Mrs Jenny Hollingsbee, Folkestone and Hythe District Council)

1. The Commissioner explained that Operation Voice was a campaign that the OPCC run with Kent Police and the Safer Roads Partnership. There were two separate elements to it. The engagement and prevention phase - where KCC and Medway Council invested in social media advertising, in particular on the dangers of drink and drug driving. There was also a separate advertising campaign raising awareness about Crime Stoppers as an alternative way of reporting intelligence about people who were committing acts of violence against women and girls. The prevention and engagement phase was successful. There was an increase in the number of people providing information about drink and drug drivers to Crime Stoppers, as well as an increase in the number of people contacting Crime Stoppers about domestic abuse and violence against women and girls.
2. The second phase focused on enforcement. Kent Police identified hot spot areas for road traffic offences. The Police targeted individuals who were known to commit road traffic offences and who were also involved in violence against women and girls. Across the eight shifts in this phase, which included Folkestone and Hythe, 182 stops were completed, of which 57 of those individuals were known by Kent Police for violence against women and girls. 9 people were arrested; 7 of them were arrested for drug driving.
4. The Commissioner will be aware that, in relation to the work of Kent Police and the police service in general, perception of crime and ASB, and indeed with actual crime and ASB, social media can be a bane to the whole Criminal Justice System as well as a source of information, if used correctly.

What steps can or will he take to deal with the range of misinformation out there which can often be harmful, misleading and cause further issues in seeking to combat crime and ASB and ensure that those who hide behind social media, usually anonymously or under a pseudonym, are brought to justice for the harm that they bring?

(Councillor Shane Mochrie-Cox, Gravesham Borough Council)

1. The Commissioner said that, in his view, in order to tackle misinformation, there was a need to diversify the range of platforms the force used to share information about policing, crime, and intelligence and in the way it communicated with the public. A key platform the public seemed to use to share information about their community was Facebook groups. Another successful social networking platform was Nextdoor.
2. The Commissioner explained that it was very difficult to deal with misinformation and purposeful distress caused on social media. However, there was more that the police could do, for example to tackle misinformation when it leads to high tension in the community.

RESOLVED: To **note** the responses to the questions

138. Future Work Programme

(Item D1)

RESOLVED: To **note** the Future Work Programme and contact the Panel Officer with any items that the Panel would like to add to it.

139. Minutes of the Commissioner's Governance Board meeting held on 12 June 2024

(Item E1)

RESOLVED: that the minutes of the Performance and Delivery Board meeting held on 12 June 2024 **be noted**.