

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, 16 June 2022.

PRESENT: Mr P M Hill, OBE (Chair), Mr G Sandher (Vice-Chair), Mrs E Bolton, Mr I S Chittenden, Cllr A Clark, Cllr G Hackwell, Cllr Mrs J Hollingsbee, Mr M A J Hood, Cllr S Mochrie-Cox, Cllr R Palmer, Cllr H Tejan and Cllr L Dyball (Substitute for Cllr P Fleming)

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

UNRESTRICTED ITEMS

40. Election of Chair

(Item 2)

1. The Scrutiny Research Officer asked for nominations for Chair of the Kent and Medway Police and Crime Panel.
2. Cllr Hollingsbee proposed and Cllr Clark seconded that Mr Hill be elected Chair of the Kent and Medway Police and Crime Panel. No other nominations were received.

RESOLVED that Mr Hill be elected Chair of the Kent and Medway Police and Crime Panel.

41. Election of Vice-Chair

(Item 3)

1. The Chair proposed and Cllr Palmer seconded that Mr Sandher be elected Vice Chair of the Kent and Medway Police and Crime Panel. No other nominations were received.

RESOLVED that Mr Sandher be elected Vice Chair of the Kent and Medway Police and Crime Panel.

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

(Item 5)

No declarations were made.

43. Minutes of the Police and Crime Panel held on 2 February 2022

(Item 6)

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting held on 2 February 2022 were an accurate record and that they be signed by the Chairman.

44. HMICFRS PEEL Inspection 2021/22

(Item B1)

1. The Commissioner presented a report which outlined the outcome of Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services' (HMICFRS) 2021/22 PEEL Inspection of Kent Police. He explained the purpose of PEEL reports, which among other functions gave Commissioners independent assurance on the performance of their force. The new methodology used for Kent Police's inspection, which analysed 9 areas of policing were outlined and included: crime data recording; preventing crime; treatment of the public; developing a positive workplace; use of resources; protecting vulnerable people; investigating crime; responding to the public; and managing offenders. A breakdown of the force's performance against each of the areas was given, with 6 of the 9 areas rated outstanding, good or adequate. He shared his dissatisfaction that investigating crime, responding to the public and managing offenders were judged as requiring improvement. In response to the Inspection's findings, he outlined his governance and improvement plan, tasked at holding the Chief Constable to account on performance, this included the foundation of a PEEL Oversight Board and an extraordinary meeting of his Performance and Delivery Board, which would be held on 3 November, to scrutinise the effectiveness of the Chief Constable's Improvement Plan. He shared his initial assessment of the issues which had contributed towards the Inspection's conclusions, which were the impact high crime data reporting standards had on capacity and the capability to respond to crime, as well as the impact of experienced officer shortages, particularly apparent with a shortage of experienced detectives. Whilst recognising that the Investigate First scheme would provide a long-term solution to the second issue, he noted that it would take time to see measurable results. He affirmed that some of the issues raised by the Inspection would be factored into the retendering of his victims support contract. Concluding his report, the Commissioner asserted his belief that the areas requiring improvement would be judged adequate when reassessed by HMICFRS later in the year, based on the initial measures put in place and commitment from the Chief Constable.
2. The Chair expressed his disappointment at the Inspection's findings. He recognised that Kent Police had received commendable inspections in previous years and asked for an indication of Kent's performance against other forces. He reminded the Commissioner of the Panel's support for his council tax precept increases, which had been predicated on the expectation that the quality of policing in Kent would improve. He asked for an explanation of the key problems which had contributed to the poor performance outlined in the report. The Commissioner confirmed that he had reviewed all other HMICFRS inspection reports published since November 2021 and noted that the difficulty of balancing crime response and data integrity were national challenges, with most forces struggling to perform highly in both areas. He reaffirmed that this was attributed to resourcing constraints. He shared

examples of individual forces which had performed better in one area over another, linking this trend to the findings of the Kent inspection. It was explained that the response to VAWG, Rural Crime Team, as well as the Chief Constable's crime squad, had been strengthened as a response to the concerns raised in relation to the protection of vulnerable people, crime investigation and response to the public.

3. In response to a question from a Member, the Commissioner confirmed that police staff vacancy rates stood at 6%, down from a high of 9%. He agreed to share further information on this matter with Members following the meeting.
4. The Commissioner was asked what had been done to ensure that Kent Police were proactive rather than reactive when dealing with cases. He explained that of 396 cases identified during the inspection, upon review by Kent Police it was concluded only 1 actually required further attention. He confirmed that concerns with the methodology in this area had been shared with the Inspectorate.
5. A Member asked that the Commissioner pressure the Chief Constable to improve communication with victims of hate crime, to include explaining how and why crimes were dealt with in a particular way.
6. The Commissioner explained, following a question from a Member, that victims had rights under the Victims' Code, which included the right of review. He asked that cases be referred to Professional Standards should Members have concerns over the handling of individual cases.
7. A Member asked why Kent Police's inspection could not reasonably be compared to those of other forces. The Commissioner explained that Kent's inspection used a new methodology which made it difficult to compare it with previous inspections. He noted that Sussex Police were to be inspected under the same methodology and that it would provide a good comparison. Beyond direct inspection comparisons, the Commissioner recognised the importance of comparing Kent to forces of a similar size, such as Staffordshire or Essex, and stressed the need to understand what had been done well by exemplary forces such as Leicestershire.
8. The Vice Chair shared his concerns that the three key areas highlighted for improvement were core policing functions and vital for ensuring community safety. He asked what had been done to reassure communities. The Commissioner agreed that the areas for improvement were central to Kent Police's overall impact. He confirmed that the public could be reassured that there had been an 18% increase in rape prosecutions and that Domestic Abuse Hubs had been set up to protect victims, though he acknowledged that communication of these developments could be improved.
9. A Member asked whether there had been a wider impact on Kent Police's operating capacity as a result of the measures put in place to resolve the issues highlighted by the PEEL report. The Commissioner reassured Members

that combating serious crime remained the priority and that key operations had not been negatively impacted. He added that officers were redeployed across the force on an ad hoc basis to improve resilience.

10. Following a request from the Chair, the Commissioner agreed to provide an interim verbal update at the Panel's next meeting in September.

RESOLVED to note the report and agree to a further written update at the Panel's December 2022 meeting.

45. Draft PCC Succession Plan

(Item B2)

1. The Commissioner explained the requirement to agree a formal succession plan following a Home Office directive. He outlined his proposal for the OPCC Chief Executive to be appointed as acting commissioner, if required. He confirmed that he did not intend to appoint a deputy or delegate any responsibilities whilst in office.
2. Mr Harper gave reassurance that he would, as the statutory Chief Executive, be willing to take on the role of acting commissioner in the event of a Commissioner vacancy or incapacitation, with the express direction and guidance of the Panel until an election.

RESOLVED to agree the draft Succession Plan.

46. Update on Fraud

(Item B3)

1. The Commissioner presented his written update on fraud. He explained the responsibilities of Action Fraud and Kent Police in relation to fraud reporting. He confirmed that Kent had witnessed a 22% increase in fraud reports over the past year. He shared his concerns at the overall impact of Action Fraud, though noted that a significant amount of fraud and cyber crime originated outside of the UK. He explained that fraud reports were not held to same crime reporting standards as other crimes. Kent Police's measures to tackle economic, cyber and fraud crimes in partnership with Essex Police, as a result of Panel support for precept increases, were summarised and included a 22 officer unit which worked alongside the organised crime, cyber crime, financial intelligence and proceeds of crime teams.
2. Concerning accountability, he noted that Commissioners had worked together nationally to identify opportunities to combat fraud and provide victims a better response, with the Association of Police and Crime Commissioners having a national fraud lead. He stated that the current system required reform and explained the possible advantages of a national coordinator and further powers for local forces.
3. Members shared their concerns at the fraud trends on a national and local level as well as the inability to combat and effectively coordinate a response to the issue.

4. A Member asked that the Commissioner press the Chief Constable to improve the police response to fraud carried out by organised crime groups as well as doorstep fraud in progress. Regarding fraud in progress, the Commissioner encouraged members of the public to dial 999. He confirmed that the Community Safety Units (CSUs) monitored local intelligence and trading standards reports to identify and combat organised fraud.
5. The Commissioner agreed, following a question from a Member, that there was scope to include fraud alerts on My Community Voice.

RESOLVED to note the report and request a further update at the appropriate time.

47. Violence Against Women and Girls Inquiry - update
(Item B4)

1. The Commissioner gave an update on the progress of his Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG) Inquiry. He confirmed that the Inquiry's final report would be published in the coming weeks and that he would use it to hold the wider criminal justice system to account on the issue. In relation to activities over the previous year, he explained that the police response to VAWG had developed in real time, including the implementation of an officer identity verification process, which had been used by members of the public more than 70 times. He thanked victims for sharing their stories at victim focus groups and noted the profound impact their experiences had on the Inquiry. He assured Members that he had urged the force to remind victims of their rights under the Victims' Code. He explained that he supported education schemes with schools, with the aim of addressing perpetrator behaviour. Regarding initial areas for improvement, he noted that preliminary findings had made it clear that more should be done to provide victims with quality updates.
2. Following a question from the Chair, the Commissioner explained that the VAWG Coordinator would be a new role, which was required to join up efforts and prevent duplication across the system. He reassured the Panel that there would be no real term increase in the OPCC budget as a result of the new role.
3. A Member stressed the importance of building public confidence through communicating the outcomes of the justice system and raised concerns that lengthy 101 response times reduced confidence. The Commissioner confirmed that he had urged the Chief Constable to redouble efforts to share outcomes, including the larger picture and overall impact on tackling perpetrators. He agreed that it was important to improve 101 response times as instances of VAWG were often reported this way, including 27% of rape reports. He reassured the Panel that cases were treated equally regardless of how they were first reported.
4. A Member asked for an indication of how diverse the survey respondents were, including a breakdown across different communities and ethnic groups.

The Commissioner agreed to share the requested information with the Panel following the meeting.

5. The Commissioner was asked how victims who had difficulties lodging appeals were supported. He confirmed that victim support arrangements were in place and agreed to share further information on provision with Members.
6. The Vice Chair asked whether future updates would address a victim's journey and service consistency across ethnicities. The Commissioner reassured the Panel that he intended on improving victim satisfaction mapping, in order that different crime types and their impact on victims with protected characteristics could be understood.

RESOLVED to note the report and agree to a further update at the Panel's December 2022 meeting.

POST MEETING NOTE: The Violence Against Women and Girls Inquiry report was published on 26 July 2022 and can be viewed on the Commissioner's website (www.kent-pcc.gov.uk/SysSiteAssets/media/downloads/vawg/final-vawg-inquiry-report--kent-pcc-summer-2022.pdf).

48. Decision OPCC.D.029.22 - Legally Qualified Chairs and other members of Police Misconduct Panels (Item C1)

RESOLVED to endorse the decision to provide indemnity to Legally Qualified Chairs and other members of Police Misconduct Panels until such time as the Home Office finds a national solution.

49. Questions to the Commissioner (Item D1)

Question 1

Can the PCC explain how he will hold the Chief Constable to account for the appalling response times to answering 999 calls and that the fixation with police numbers is not resulting to service cuts elsewhere within Kent Police?
(Cllr Richard Palmer, Swale Borough Council)

1. The Commissioner responded to the question by confirming that the Home Office had set up a 999 response time league table, which indicated that Kent Police had median and mean response times of 5 and 16 seconds respectively, which were in line with national averages. He reassured the Panel that he had held the Chief Constable to account at the Performance and Delivery Board, with the Chief Constable acknowledging that response times required improvement. He committed to monitor the issue closely. Regarding the Police Officer Uplift Programme, he reaffirmed his support for the Programme and underscored the benefits of increased officer numbers. He stated that he would welcome further funding for staff, in order to reduce the financial burden on Kent Police, whilst recognising that there was more to be done to reduce non-staffing costs.

Question 2

In his role in holding the Chief Constable to account, can the PCC explain, in light of the estimated £34m budget cuts over the life cycle of the latest Police and Crime Plan, how the Neighbourhood Policing review will ensure that communities will have enhanced policing and PCSO patrols and the ability to prevent, investigate and take speedy action against ASB, crimes and suspected crimes and linked to this how the 101 and 999 call rates can be improved as ASB, crime or suspected crime has become too difficult to report recently and residents have the right to a speedy response and full investigation and feedback with actions of said reports?
(Cllr Shane Mochrie-Cox, Gravesham Borough Council)

2. The Commissioner responded by confirming that he had received assurances from the Chief Constable that the Neighbourhood Policing Review would increase resilience and improve the quality of community policing. He stressed that he considered the maintenance of PCSOs as a fundamental requirement. Concerning efforts to reduce waiting times, he recognised that the force had previously been successful, as a result of him holding the Chief Constable to account, and committed to ensure a similar outcome on this occasion.

50. Future work programme

(Item E1)

RESOLVED that the work programme be noted.

51. Minutes of the Commissioner's Performance and Delivery Board meeting held on 16 March 2022

(Item F1)

RESOLVED that the minutes of the Performance and Delivery Board held on 16 March 2022 be noted.