

Critical police report dominates Panel meeting

A DAMNING report into negative behaviours and cultures in the Met Police dominated question time at the latest Sussex Police and Crime Panel meeting.

Panel members were keen to hear what measures were in place at Sussex Police to identify bad behaviour and address any negative culture in the force in light of the Casey report published this week.

Commissioner Katy Bourne told the Panel at the meeting on Friday, March 24, that she was taking the outcome of the report extremely seriously saying it would be too easy to say that this is an issue that only affects the Met.

“If the Met sneezes all other forces catch a cold,” she said. “This report is a pivotal moment for the Met Police, but also for other police forces across the county. You cannot police without consent and public confidence in the police is low.

Responding to questions about how the force was identifying and dealing with poor behaviour, Mrs Bourne told the Panel that Sussex Police, including her own office, were currently going through a re-vetting process.

She also spoke about the protection for whistle-blowers and pointed to an anonymous line that allows officers to report concerns but said that in an ideal world staff and officers would feel supported enough to challenge bad behaviour openly when they see it.

While recognising the importance of vetting, the Panel were concerned about the underlying culture within Sussex Police and about the effect of the report on officers and police staff, prompting the Commissioner to pay tribute to continued good work of the vast majority of people working within Sussex Police.

The Commissioner presented a report to the Panel on her role in the oversight of police custody carried out through the Independent Custody Visitors (ICV) – volunteers who make unannounced visits to police custody to scrutinise the treatment and wellbeing of those detained.

Concerns were raised by the Panel about the level of training volunteers received to deal with complex issues and questions were asked about why they were volunteers and not paid staff.

Mrs Bourne said the training is set nationally and that, as volunteers, ICVs could remain independent of the police service and of the criminal justice system so their feedback is completely independent and they could “say it how it is”.

The Panel noted the report.

Following the meeting, Panel chairman Cllr Christian Mitchell said: “Much of the Panel question time was quite rightly dedicated to fall-out from the Casey report and how Sussex Police were ensuring they stamped out any issues in their own force.

“I think Panel members were reassured by the measures already in place and the Commissioner’s realistic approach and commitment to tackling any issues.”

The next meeting of the Sussex Police and Crime Panel will take place on Friday, June 30. Full details, agendas and links to a webcast of the meeting can be found at www.sussexpcp.gov.uk

Ends.