

Panel scrutinises Commissioner's annual report

THE WORK of the Sussex Police and Crime Commissioner came under the spotlight when she presented her tenth annual report to a scrutiny panel last week.

Also during the Annual Meeting of the Sussex Police and Crime Panel Cllr Judy Rogers was elected as Chair and Cllr Andrei Czolak appointed as Vice-Chair, while Mrs Susan Scholefield and Mr Keith Naphthine were reappointed as Independent Members of the Panel for further one-year terms.

Work to strengthen policing and tackle crime, the disruption of organised crime, and action to support victims and tackle violence against women were discussed at the meeting held on Friday, June 30.

The Commissioner, Katy Bourne, reported there are now more police officers patrolling Sussex streets than in 2018, including 250 directly paid for by local people through increases to the Council Tax precept over the last five years.

Ms Bourne also highlighted to the Panel the continued work of the Rural Crime Team in tackling the criminal behaviour that affects rural and isolated communities locally, and the dedicated Business Crime Team which was established to tackle business and retail crime across Sussex.

Other successes in the report included the launch of the Digital Investigation Support Unit to support investigations where physical and/or online digital evidence is involved and the success of hotspot policing in driving crime down and criminals out of targeted areas in Brighton.

In welcoming the work of the Rural Crime team, the Panel asked that specific examples illustrating the positive impact of the unit be included.

The Panel also raised concerns about the visibility of police officers in town centres and how effectively shoplifting was being tackled in Sussex.

In her report Ms Bourne also acknowledged the impact on public confidence of police officers abusing their power.

She highlighted the importance of rooting out 'people who should not hold a warrant card' as 'you cannot catch criminals with crooked cops.'

At the meeting, the Panel also scrutinised the Commissioner's response to His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Service following the inspectorate's 2020/21 Police Effectiveness, Efficiency and Legitimacy (PEEL) assessment of Sussex Police, which assessed two areas as inadequate - recording data about crime and responding to the public.

In her response, Ms Bourne acknowledged that elements of the report were 'sobering' and that 'swift action' must be taken to provide residents with the best policing service.

The Panel questioned the Commissioner about the inadequate ratings and how the Force has been recording crime.

ISSUED ON BEHALF OF THE SUSSEX POLICE AND CRIME PANEL

Ms Bourne explained the police have to record crime in a certain way and the inadequate assessment was related to a technical decision on how Sussex Police records crime data.

Speaking after the meeting, Chair Cllr Judy Rogers thanked the Commissioner for her extensive report and her work over the past year.

Cllr Rogers said: “We appreciate the detailed report and time given by the Commissioner to present her annual update and address members’ concerns following the PEEL assessment.

“While the Panel were disappointed to read HM Inspector has assessed two areas of Sussex Police as inadequate, we feel reassured following the Commissioner’s explanations and look forward to further updates on the action being taken to address this.

“Given the increase in the Commissioner’s council tax precept, which the Panel endorsed, it’s important that Panel members understand how the Commissioner has held the Chief Constable to account for how the money was spent, and scrutinises what benefits Sussex’s residents will see for their investment.”

The next meeting of the Sussex Police and Crime Panel will take place on Friday, September 22 at 10.30am at County Hall, Lewes.

Ends