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Sussex Police and Crime Panel

22 March 2024 – At a meeting of the Committee held at 10.30 am at County Hall, Lewes.

Present:

Cllr Cross	East Sussex County Council	Cllr Czolak	Brighton & Hove City Council
Cllr Bangert	Chichester District Council	Cllr Khan	Crawley Borough Council
Cllr Bannister	Eastbourne Borough Council	Cllr Standley	East Sussex County Council
Cllr Baynham	Horsham District Council	Cllr Keene	Lewes District Council
Cllr Bennett	Mid Sussex District Council	Cllr Drayson	Rother District Council
Cllr Williams	Wealden District Council	Cllr Mitchell	West Sussex County Council
Cllr Whorlow	Worthing Borough Council	Mr Napthine	Independent member
Mrs Scholefield	Independent member		

Substitutes:

Cllr Cross, East Sussex County Council (In place of Cllr Hilton)

Apologies were received from Cllr Rogers (Hastings Borough Council), Cllr Boram (Adur District Council), Cllr Walsh (Arun District Council), Cllr Bagaen (Brighton and Hove City Council) and Cllr Ali (West Sussex County Council).

Also in attendance: Also in attendance: Mrs Katy Bourne (Sussex Police and Crime Commissioner), Mark Streater (OSPCC Chief Executive and Monitoring Officer), Iain McCulloch (OSPCC Chief Finance Officer) and Mervin Dadd (OSPCC Chief Communications and Insight Officer).

Part I

24. Chair's Welcome and Introductions

24.1 The Vice-Chair, Cllr Czolak, stood in to chair the meeting following apologies received from Cllr Rogers.

25. Declarations of Interest

25.1 No interests were declared in addition to the standing table of personal interests.

26. Minutes of the Previous Meeting

- 26.1 The Chair asked members to note the following amendment to minute 17.2 from the Panel meeting on 26 January, at the request of the OSPCC:

The Chief Constable has made a commitment that Sussex Police will attend the scene of all residential burglaries reported to them to try and secure the best possible evidence that will support effective investigations and maximise the potential for delivering successful outcomes. It was also explained that a large amount of evidence pertaining to retail crimes is not actionable due to internal processes preventing the Force's access to it.

- 26.2 Resolved – that the minutes of the previous meeting held on 26 January 2024 be approved as a correct record and that they be signed by the Chair.

27. Panel Questions to the Commissioner

- 27.1 The Chair invited questions from the Panel to the Commissioner. A summary of the main questions and responses were as follows:

Question 1: Does the Commissioner know how the Force responded to a letter sent by Suella Braverman MP (September 2023) to all PCCs regarding police involvement in political matters and political activism?

Answer: The Commissioner said that Sussex Police was one of the forces included as part of inspections into activism and impartiality in policing by His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire and Rescue Services (HMICFRS). It was added that she had not seen the formal response but offered to follow-up as a post-meeting action.

Supplementary: Does the Commissioner share the MP's concerns as outlined in the letter?

Answer: The Commissioner said it is her role to ensure that HMICFRS has full access to the Force and it is her duty to respond to the recommendations within the statutory 56-day period.

Question 2: Where can Sussex Police's responses to a number of historical policing reviews be found?

Answer: The Commissioner confirmed that responses are published online where there is a requirement for her to issue a response in her role. She added that reviews are considered in further detail where possible at her monthly Performance and Accountability Meetings (PAMs).

Supplementary: What are the Commissioner's feelings towards the perceived lack of public confidence?

Answer: The Commissioner acknowledged that it has been a difficult time for local policing due to a series of events, but her personal interactions with members of the public have shown widespread support for the Force.

Question 3: Does the Commissioner promote 'good news' about the work of the Force?

Answer: The Commissioner commented that the Chief Constable's staff hold divisional award ceremonies on a regular basis to help showcase individual and collective acts of bravery and achievements. The Commissioner added that she uses her social media channels to highlight two to three positive stories on a weekly basis, known as 'Force Focus Friday'.

Question 4: Is the Rural Crime Team (RCT) sufficiently resourced to combat the threat of invasive drone use? The work of the RCT was praised.

Answer: The Commissioner revealed that Sussex Police is leading the way nationally in their use of unmanned aerial vehicles (also known as drones) in Sussex. The Commissioner suggested that the Panel may wish to consider an agenda item around drone investment within the Force at a future meeting. She also welcomed the positive feedback and said she would pass it on to the Force.

Question 5: How effective is it that Sussex Police are required to obtain Chichester District Council's permission to review CCTV footage since the Council began funding the local operation? Praise was reserved for Will Keating-Jones (District Commander for Arun and Chichester) for his professionalism at a recent meeting with councillors in Arun.

Answer: The Commissioner said this should be directed to Chichester District Council as it is a question about their processes. She welcomed the positive feedback and said this would be passed on to the Force.

Question 6: Do you know if the rates of criminality among Sussex Police officers are comparable to the wider population? If higher, might targeted research help the Chief Constable to discover the root causes?

Answer: The Commissioner said that complaints made against the Force's officers are dealt with by her office and the rate of upheld appeals are currently running at around 10%. Mr Streater added that statistics are held in terms of police officers convicted of a criminal offence, but not a comparison with the national picture. He added that this could be obtained over a relevant time period.

Question 7: Was there sufficient funding in place to transfer to a new CCTV operator and ensure its continued provision across Sussex?

Answer: The Commissioner commented that the self-funded partnership is made up of 21 organisations and since the transition they have found that using different cameras with a new contractor is two thirds cheaper to run than was previously, and represents a significant cost saving.

Supplementary: Is analysis being carried out in terms of any communities which aren't moving forward with the changeover to a new operator?

Answer: The Commissioner said that the Force has appointed Inspector Atkinson to help corral partners around this and that a review is ongoing. She added that Sussex Police does not have sole responsibility for the

partnership and that any gaps in service highlighted by the review will hopefully be resolved by the partnership.

Question: Sussex Police are commended for their success in tackling County Lines, however Brighton & Hove continues to receive residents' reports of a substantial rise in drug use. What assurances can you offer to Brighton & Hove residents and in Sussex that this is a priority for the Force to stamp out?

Answer: The Commissioner referred to Priority 2 in her Sussex Police & Crime Plan (Relentless disruption of serious and organised crime) and highlighted that the Force disrupted 585 drug lines across the County in 2023, of these 175 were County Lines. The Commissioner added that the OSPCC annually contributes several hundred thousand pounds to Brighton & Hove City Council towards the delivery of drug prevention programmes. She emphasised that it remains a focus and there is a balance to find between enforcement and helping people to overcome addictions.

Supplementary: Some residents have voiced how they've found it a challenge to report sightings and the invasive nature of police questioning. How can that process be made more efficient so that we can ensure members of the public continue to play an effective role in being the eyes and ears on the ground?

Answer: The Commissioner explained that officers are required to gather intelligence in a set format and this method prevents the Force from having to go back to a person for further intel, which is resource intensive. She added that residents have the option to report anonymously through Crimestoppers, who work closely with the Force.

28. The Commissioner's Role as the Review Body for Schedule 3 Policing Complaints, and from the Commissioner's Oversight Duties over Sussex Police's Complaints System More Generally

28.1 The Panel considered a report by the Sussex Police and Crime Commissioner.

28.2 The Chair invited the Panel to ask questions. A summary of the main questions and responses were as follows:

Question 1: In relation to table 3.1, it shows that 149 reviews were not upheld, have you looked into these and if so, is there a re-occurring theme?

Answer: The Commissioner described the process for initial complaints received by Professional Standards and those referred to the OSPCC where the complainant is not satisfied with the outcome. She acknowledged that the number of upheld reviews is slightly up compared to last year, while the rate is comparable nationally. The Commissioner is confident that there is a robust process in place

and it does not give her any cause for concern. She added that any local or national themes will be picked up at her Governance Team's integrity meetings with the Force and IOPOC for dip sampling.

Question 2: In relation to table 3.1, 37 reviews to be completed is considerably higher than the previous figure reported, what is the reason for that?

Answer: The Commissioner said that the OSPCC are being asked to carry out more reviews and was not surprised by this figure as she explained that a number of cases are quite complex and detailed. She explained that the varied nature of cases means that the OSPCC has to go back to the Force for further information and this can extend the length of the process. The Commissioner maintained that she would rather her team take their time, follow the process and be thorough.

Question 3: Do you feel that your ability to enforce sanctions as Commissioner are not as good as they could be, in comparison to a local government ombudsman?

Answer: The Commissioner clarified that she has powers to make recommendations and the Force can choose to adopt them or not. She added that every recommendation made to date has been accepted by the Force and this demonstrates a good working relationship. The Commissioner explained that the OSPCC does have contact with the complainant and many just want to be heard and made to feel involved in their case, rather than see sanctions imposed. She said it is rare to receive a further complaint once a complaint has been upheld.

Question 4: In relation to table 3.1, what is your assessment of the sizeable increase in the number of reviews received between 2020/21 and the current reporting year?

Answer: The Commissioner said that there is increased transparency in terms of people becoming more aware of their rights and this is evidence of them exercising their right to complain.

Question 5: From your experience, do you think the role of the Commissioner is still necessary and relevant in today's policing or could duties be de-centralised among other local police services?

Answer: The Commissioner said that the Home Affairs Select Committee and Public Accounts Committee have already justified the role in Parliament. She added that she believes members of the public who are aware of her role's responsibilities do value having a Commissioner as their public voice in policing and someone they can approach.

- 28.3 The Chair suggested whether in future the Commissioner's report could reflect the stage of each complaint in the backlog, to enable the Panel to differentiate between those that have been delayed and those at the appeals stage as an example.
- 28.4 The Commissioner reiterated that the volume of complaints received has increased and these are managed by a small team.

She maintained that she does not have any cause for concern at this point in time and has belief in the speed of her team's work. She added that the complainants are kept informed at every stage of the appeal process.

28.5 Resolved - that the Panel noted the report.

29. Quarterly Report of Complaints

29.1 The Panel considered a report by the Clerk to the Sussex Police and Crime Panel.

29.2 The Chair reminded members that a meeting of the Panel's Complaints Sub Committee will take place on 11 April 2024 at County Hall, Lewes.

29.3 Resolved – that the Panel noted the report.

30. Date of Next Meeting and Future Meeting Dates

30.1 The next meeting of the Panel would take place on 28 June 2024 at 10.30am, at County Hall, Lewes.

The meeting ended at 11.34 am

Chairman