

### **Panel quizzes Commissioner at first meeting since re-election**

OFFICER welfare and conviction rates for sexual offences were among concerns raised by Sussex Police and Crime Panel last week.

At its first meeting since the re-election of the Sussex Police and Crime Commissioner, Panel members also quizzed Katy Bourne on the time taken to complete criminal background checks and the care of children when dealt with by police.

Newly elected Panel chair Cllr Andrei Czolak highlighted a Sussex Police survey which found 90 per cent of respondents felt morale in the Force was either low or very low and that only 12 per cent felt valued.

He asked the Commissioner if any efforts had been made to explore the root causes of low morale and how that can be challenged to ensure officers feel more valued.

Mrs Bourne pointed to some of the more positive outcomes from the survey but agreed that low morale was an important issue to address. She said that she had raised this with the Chief Constable in one of her regular performance and accountability meetings and was reassured that steps were being taken to improve the situation.

Speaking about concerns about sexual offences conviction rates, Mrs Bourne said they were among the most difficult and complex crimes that forces had to deal with and, whilst conviction rates had not improved at the rate she would have liked, a lot of work was going on to address the issue.

This included Operation Soteria Bluestone which aims to improve the police's response to rape and the introduction of a new unit to enable time to be dedicated to progressing cases and improving conviction rates.

During the meeting, the Commissioner presented her annual report to the Panel which looked back at the achievements and challenges of 2023/24.

The Panel welcomed the opportunity to reflect back on the challenges and successes of the previous year.

Members acknowledged the small reduction in the number of people killed and seriously injured on Sussex's roads, but asked for more assurance that the operations to tackle road safety were effective and that the Commissioner was confident that the Force were doing enough to address the issue.

Other questions from Panel members covered the rural crime unit, the progress of Sussex Police's transformation programme, and the rise in the number of shoplifting incidents and concerns over the level of detection.

Following discussion, chair Cllr Czolak thanked the Commissioner for her report. He said it would be useful to include links to more information about areas covered, and have relevant performance data to back up areas of good performance mentioned in reports.

At Friday's meeting the Panel elected Cllr Czolak as chair and Cllr Mark Baynham as vice chair.

ISSUED ON BEHALF OF THE SUSSEX POLICE AND CRIME PANEL

Cllr Czolak paid tribute to the outgoing chair Cllr Judy Rogers and gave his sincere thanks for all her work, before welcoming the new Panel members.

The next meeting of the Sussex Police and Crime Panel will be held on Friday, September 27.

Ends.