

PERFORMANCE & ACCOUNTABILITY MEETING

DATE: 18 October 2013

LOCATION: Office of the Sussex Police & Crime Commissioner, Sackville House, Lewes

PRESENT: Police & Crime Commissioner Katy Bourne (KB)
Chief Executive Mark Streater
Chief Constable Martin Richards (MR)
Policy Officer Graham Kane – minutes
Executive Assistant Gina Wheatley
Detective Chief Inspector Mike Ashcroft

CRIME & COMMUNITY SAFETY

BURGLARY

Q. I am pleased to note that the number of recorded burglary dwellings has reduced across the Performance Plan Year 1 April to 30 September 2013, in comparison to the same period in 2012. What recent successes has Sussex Police experienced in this area following the update that you gave in September?

A) What successes are directly attributable to Operation Magpie?

B) Sussex Police are placed 30th in the national league table for burglary detections and sixth out of their eight Most Similar Group of forces. Why do you think that the Force is struggling to improve these detection rates?

C) What proactive initiatives are Sussex Police implementing to tackle burglaries given the impending changing of the clocks and forthcoming darker evenings?

MR acknowledged that Sussex Police and KB were concerned with the previous levels of burglary dwellings recorded across the county, and emphasised that the launch of Operation Magpie has re-focussed this area of activity. MR stated that the reductions in the recorded number of burglary dwellings (230 fewer) across the current Performance Plan Year were encouraging and confirmed that he would like to maintain this shift in momentum.

MR also confirmed that the detection rates are starting to improve but explained that Sussex Police are not as strong as other forces in terms of converting single offences into multiple charges, through offences Taken into Consideration. This is an area that Sussex Police would like to improve in and regularly compare notes with their south-east regional forces. MR concluded by stating that he was proud of the ethical recording standards that are in place at Sussex Police and ensure accurate levels of recording.

KB welcomed the quarterly working group that has been set up within Sussex Police to look at burglaries, with both an internal and external focus. MR explained that the Force will continue to regularly interact and engage with local people regarding crime and prevention advice through neighbourhood policing, PCSOs and social media. This is particularly relevant with the clocks changing next weekend.

ACTION: MR to provide KB with a list of the Most Similar Group of towns, cities and areas that Brighton & Hove are compared against nationally.

CYBER CRIME

Q. The Home Secretary has recently launched the National Crime Agency and the new National Cyber Crime Unit within it marks a significant milestone in terms of confronting and combating online criminals. Advances in technology have transformed the threat of cyber crime and this remains an emerging risk. What assurances can you provide me with that Sussex Police are taking appropriate steps to counter these online threats?

A) How will Sussex Police work with the revised National Crime Agency to tackle cyber crime locally?

MR explained that although Sussex Police do not have a dedicated Cyber Crime Unit they have a High Tech Crime Unit which looks at online and economic crime. A south-east regional Cyber Crime Unit is also being considered. Sussex Police also have a Cyber Crime and Digital Crime Policy and available guidance for officers and staff. MR stated that cyber crime requires joined up approaches locally, regionally, nationally and internationally because cyber crime is not restricted to tangible boundaries.

MR confirmed that Sussex Police are awaiting a report containing recommendations and opportunities identified by HMIC in relation to cyber crime following a recent two day visit. Further work into cyber crime prevention is currently being researched and assessed by the Force. KB emphasised the importance of Sussex Police being proactive in this particular area and encouraged the wider promotion of raising awareness.

SERIOUS SEXUAL OFFENCES

Q. I note that there has been an increase of 26% in the number of recorded serious sexual offences over the Performance Plan Year 1 April to 30 September 2013, in comparison to last year. This increase has also been apparent across all divisions. Are these additional offences new or historic and what is the nature of these offences?

A) What are Sussex Police doing to be more proactive in terms of tackling orchestrated violence against women?

MR confirmed that the increases in recorded serious sexual offences across the current Performance Plan Year are made up of both new and historic offences. MR acknowledged that although this represents additional victims, it is encouraging that these individuals have a greater determination and are confident to report these crimes to Sussex Police.

This provides a positive indicator in terms of the service and support provided by Sussex Police. MR stated that it is vital that the Force continues to invest in a victim centred approach through support, education and preventative advice. MR also emphasised the importance of working with, and in partnership with, other agencies around this particular area.

RESPONSE TIMES

Q. I was pleased to note that there has been an improvement in Grade 1 response times in comparison to the previous Performance Plan Year. This improvement was again apparent across all divisions. What specific activities have been undertaken by Sussex Police to improve these response times?

MR was pleased to confirm that there has been a Forcewide improvement in Grade 1 response times in comparison to the previous Performance Plan Year, but emphasised that Sussex Police would not become complacent. The response times have been improved through a collective and joined up approach across the Force and greater use of technology, more effective call handling (by grading calls correctly) and better use of officer and vehicle deployment (by breaking down geographical boundaries) have all contributed to the improved response times.

ACTION: MR to keep KB updated regarding this particular area

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Q. I am pleased to note that the percentage of non emergency calls answered within 60 seconds has increased from 49% in August, to 54% as at 6 October 2013. Although this is still below the Force target of 75%, the performance across September of 79.9% was particularly encouraging, and has continued into October. What do you attribute this recent improvement in performance to?

A) Are you confident that this improving trend will continue?

MR recognised that this remains a priority for the Force because of the direct impact on reputation. The recent improvements in non-emergency call answering times have been attributed to individuals becoming more confident in the new system, investment in staff (through the recruitment of additional call handlers) and the availability of overtime for call handlers. MR is confident that this improving trend will continue and also understands that further challenges will occur across this particular area as part of the Quest Project which will bring all of the call handlers within the Force together at one site. It was acknowledged that these associated risks will need to be managed.

ACTION: MR to keep KB updated regarding this particular area

OPERATION CRACKDOWN

Approximately 16% of all correspondence to the OSPCC has been in relation to road safety and anti-social driving. On 5 August 2013, Operation Crackdown was relaunched to make it quicker and easier for members of the public to report incidents of anti-social driving and users can now keep track of the progress of their case through the unique reference number provided. How confident are you that a member of the public will be updated after making a report on Operation Crackdown?

A) How do you measure the success of Operation Crackdown?

B) Statistically, criminals are more likely to drive untaxed and uninsured vehicles and will also engage in anti-social driving. What assurances can you provide me that Sussex Police are proactively targeting these individuals?

MR confirmed that Operation Crackdown was relaunched in August to make it quicker and easier for members of the public to report incidents of anti-social driving by providing an online, self service facility. MR also promoted the limited availability of a telephone service to take reports from those individuals that do not have the ability to self-serve online.

It was also explained that prior to the relaunch of Operation Crackdown the average number of reports received was 1,500 per month. This has increased to 3,000 in August and rose again in September to 4,200. As a result, Sussex Police sent out in excess of 3,000 advisory letters to motorists in September (previously the average was about 1,000 per month). MR stated that routine campaigns to target criminals using the roads are led by the Roads Policing Unit.

OPERATION FRESCO

Q. I understand that Operation Fresco has been set up ahead of the proposed strike by the fire service tomorrow evening. What are Sussex Police's plans in preparation of this scheduled industrial action?

MR explained that Sussex Police have been liaising with chief officers from the East and West Sussex Fire & Rescue Services and confirmed that contingency plans are in place ahead of the scheduled industrial action. Operation Fresco has been created within Sussex Police to provide extra support to the fire service.

COMPLAINTS AGAINST OFFICERS

Q. I recently met with the Head of the Professional Standards Department to review the Quarter 1 complaint allegations, recorded between 1 April and 30 June 2013, and I note that there has been a small increase compared to last year. In particular, an additional 57 complaints relating to 'Failures in Duty' were recorded compared to the same Quarter in 2012, which equates to an increase of 49%. What assurances can you provide me that when specific increases are identified across particular allegation types these are investigated and understood?

A) How are the complaint allegations received by Sussex Police used to inform decisions regarding additional training needs?

MR confirmed that only 6% (15) of all complaint allegations were upheld by the Professional Standards Department across the Quarter 1 period, 1 April to 30 June 2013. It was explained that regular reviews of complaint allegations and patterns are carried out to identify training needs for individuals, teams and the Force as a whole. The lessons learnt from the Independent Police Complaints Commission and internally from the Professional Standards Department are also used to inform decisions regarding additional training needs. MR also confirmed that West Sussex County Council conduct regular audits of the business interests declared by officers and staff.

VALUE FOR MONEY

OVER-SPEND ON AGENCY AND TEMPORARY STAFF

Q. I note from the Budget Monitoring Report in August that the anticipated under-spend for Police Staff was £1.8m which is nearly as much as the anticipated over-spend for Agency and Temporary Staff of £1.9m. Why do Sussex Police not employ these staff directly instead of losing this experience when Agency and Temporary Staff move on?

A) How long do you anticipate that the over-spend on Agency and Temporary Staff will exist for?

MR acknowledged that approximately 3 to 4% of all posts within Sussex Police are filled by Agency and Temporary Staff and that this approach provides value for money. The benefits of increased flexibility, fixed term contracts and filling of specialist roles were explained. MR confirmed that Sussex Police are looking to reduce the Agency and Temporary Staff expenditure and anticipated that a reduction of a third is expected in the second half of 2013/2014.

ACTION: MR to keep KB updated regarding this particular area

ESTATES STRATEGY

Q. In June, I unveiled a 5-year estates strategy. This is a £20m investment programme for police buildings to improve the accessibility and visibility of neighbourhood policing by looking at how services can be delivered more efficiently. Can you give me an update on the progress made to date?

MR reiterated that the estates strategy seeks to improve the accessibility and visibility of neighbourhood policing by looking at how services can be delivered more efficiently, through the better use of mobile technology. Progress updates regarding Eastbourne Town Hall and Barnham Village Hall were provided. KB was reassured to note that the learning from the Hove Town Hall co-location has been captured.

MR was aware that where co-locations between Sussex Police and partners exist there have been differences and difficulties in bringing together varying cultures and operating styles. MR acknowledged that more communication with partners is required to understand the needs, wants and expectations of each other.

MR concluded by emphasising that the progress and investment made so far is encouraging.