

PERFORMANCE & ACCOUNTABILITY MEETING

DATE: 20 December 2013

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

PRESENT: Police & Crime Commissioner Katy Bourne (KB)
Chief Executive Mark Streater (MS)
Chief Constable Martin Richards (MR)
Deputy Chief Constable Giles York (GY)
Director of Finance (MB)
Policy Officer Graham Kane – minutes
Communications Manager Rosie Gooch
Administration Clerk Sarah Tibbott
Police Sergeant Rachel Carr

CHIEF CONSTABLE RETIREMENT

KB confirmed that after nearly 32 years in policing MR had advised her of his decision to retire with effect from March 2014.

KB thanked MR and recognised his tremendous contribution to Sussex Police during his six years as Chief Constable. KB confirmed that GY would carry out the role of Temporary Chief Constable throughout the recruitment process.

PUBLIC CONFIDENCE

RESPONSE TIMES

Q. I note that there has been an overall reduction in Grade 1 response times in comparison to the previous performance plan year. How are Sussex Police continuing to monitor, review and improve these response times?

MR confirmed that there had been an increased number of calls but a reduction in response times. However, MR informed the meeting that the Force was returning to previous levels of performance despite an increased demand. This was highlighted by the direction of travel for the individual months of November and December.

MR reiterated that the Force want to achieve a safe response to calls and have set up a working group to focus on five key areas of performance; technology, deployment of vehicles, training of call handlers, continued support for response teams and increased recruitment of police officers.

MR stated that transformational changes to the organisation have naturally impacted on performance, including a 20% reduction in the Force budget, coupled with finite resources. MR concluded by stating that this highlights the importance that deployment is based on intelligence.

101 – NON-EMERGENCY CALL ANSWERING

Q. I was pleased to note at the October PAM that non-emergency calls answered within 60 seconds remains a priority for the Force because of the direct impact on reputation. You attributed the improvements in the call answering times to individuals becoming more confident in the new system, the recruitment of additional call handlers and the availability of overtime. However, I note that performance in this area has remained static from October at 56%, which is 19% under the Force target of 75%. Can you provide me with some reassurance that performance in this area remains a priority for the Force?

MR confirmed that the answering of non-emergency calls within 30 seconds remains a priority for the Force and that a working group has been set up to look at the 101 response. MR acknowledged that the stretched target of 75% continues to be a challenge for the Force and highlighted improvements to performance for the individual summer months of June, July and August.

MR stated that there are further technical solutions being considered by the Force, including a 'queue buster' (with telephone numbers taken and call backs arranged), and confirmed that additional resources, in terms of more call handling staff, are soon to be introduced. The training of these staff is scheduled to start in January 2014 and will be finished by April.

MR also confirmed that the Force are answering 95% of 999 calls within the target of 10 seconds and highlighted that user satisfaction for all calls to the contact centre stands at 98%. MR concluded by confirming that although current performance provides cause for comfort, there is no complacency and this still remains a gap for the Force to close.

ACTION: MR to keep KB updated regarding this particular area

OPERATION CRACKDOWN

Q. I was pleased to understand that following the relaunch of Operation Crackdown at the beginning of August the number of reports received had increased significantly which has resulted in more advisory letters being sent out to motorists engaging in low-level anti-social driving. Has this increasing trend continued? If so, how are Sussex Police using the increased intelligence received from the reports to target anti-social driving throughout Sussex?

A) What feedback have you received from members of the public following the relaunch of Operation Crackdown?

B) What plans are in place to improve Operation Crackdown further still?

MR acknowledged the overwhelming support that has been received for Operation Crackdown from communities following the relaunch in August. The sustained support for the service was also highlighted with the following statistics;

August – 3,004 reports received by Crackdown and 1,650 advisory letters sent to drivers
September – 4,293 reports received and 3,182 letters sent
October – 3,980 reports received and 2,611 letters sent
November – 2,858 reports received and 1,803 letters sent

MR acknowledged that since the relaunch of Operation Crackdown 184 reports have been passed to Neighbourhood Policing Teams and the Roads Policing Unit, 79 reports have been referred to other agencies (including the DVLA and VOSA) and 77 reports have been added to the Force Automatic Number Plate Recognition system.

MR also confirmed that plans are underway to develop the progress feedback that is provided to those who make a report via Operation Crackdown.

CRIME & COMMUNITY SAFETY

HMIC QUARTERLY REVIEW

Q. HMIC's quarterly review of Sussex Police took place last month and I was really pleased to note that the Crime Data Analysis Summary for Sussex highlighted that recorded crime had reduced by 6.0% and that there had been reductions across nearly all crime types. The analysis also demonstrated that there had been increases in the recorded number of serious sexual offences which is reflective of my drive to increase the reporting of this under reported crime. However, the low detection rates for serious sexual offences, including rape, which I raised at the October PAM are still of concern to me. What further efforts have been made by Sussex Police to improve the detection rates for serious sexual offences and rape?

MR stated that serious sexual offences are another area where increases in reported crime can be viewed as a positive in terms of victim confidence. However, it was highlighted that 50% of the recent increases relate to historical offences.

MR explained that the Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) have confirmed that Sussex Police are doing well with the evidence that they have but made the point that two thirds of victims of rape are uncooperative with the CPS, for a number of reasons.

It was highlighted that a scrutiny group has been set up in Brighton & Hove because they experience a higher rate of stranger serious sexual offences, compared to other places in Sussex. MR conceded that more work with partners is required to ensure that a joined up approach is apparent.

It was also explained that the Force have made contact with other cities and towns with similar night-time economies to identify any best practice that could be introduced in Sussex. MR confirmed that the Force is currently reviewing all active and undetected rape investigations by revisiting victims. In addition, Sussex Police are working with universities to heighten awareness and provide prevention advice.

OVERVIEW OF HATE CRIME IN ENGLAND AND WALES

Q. The recently published 'Overview of Hate Crime in England and Wales' report demonstrated that Sussex experienced an increase of over 15% in the number of reported hate crimes across 2012/2013, in comparison to the same period a year earlier. As you know, this is a measure in my Police & Crime Plan and this improving trend is extremely positive. Even more encouraging was that Sussex was one of only three forces that have increased reporting across all five of the hate crime strands. What do you attribute this success to?

GY confirmed that the report demonstrated an increase in reporting rather than an increase in crimes. It was explained that an increase in reporting is encouraging because victims could be seen to be more confident in the police and wider criminal justice system. However, GY stated that more work in this area, and in terms of third party reporting, is required and highlighted that a working group has been set up to challenge the work of the Force in these areas in the role of a 'critical friend'.

GY also highlighted that the resources used to investigate these hate crimes are proportionate to the demand and the relatively small numbers of crimes and incidents in Sussex. In particular, a Detective Inspector from each of the divisions has been assigned the responsibility of overseeing all of the hate crime investigations in their area to better improve user satisfaction.

CRIME RECORDING (DATA INTEGRITY)

Q. The Public Administration Select Committee recently carried out an Inquiry into Crime Statistics which raised concerns regarding the way that some police forces are recording crimes. How confident are you that all crimes are being recorded by Sussex police officers when they should be and that these crimes are being categorised correctly?

SUPPLEMENTARY Q's:

A) Are the right checks in place at Sussex Police to ensure the integrity of crime data?

B) What more could be done by the Force?

MR explained that Sussex Police have endeavoured to improve the integrity of their recorded crime by changing the culture within the Force from the top down. This has also included improving the systems and processes in place, including the implementation of Niche, which brings together all of the crime data and information in one place and enables officers and staff to work with increased flexibility. In addition, officers and staff have been provided with further training to improve their skill levels using the new systems and processes, together with affording increased discretion for officers and staff.

MR stated that he was confident that the crime recording practices within Sussex Police are increasingly victim-focussed because every report is treated as a crime in the first instance, until it is proved otherwise. However, it was highlighted that there is an obvious continuum between what is and what is not a crime and elements of subjectivity, in between. MR confirmed that the removal of targets has ensured that officers and staff are not fixated on chasing obtuse measures but acknowledged that there are risks associated with increased officer and staff discretion which need to be managed accordingly.

ACTION: MR to keep KB updated regarding this particular area. To be revisited at a future PAM.

VICTIM FOCUS

DOMESTIC ABUSE & VIOLENCE ATTRITION RATES

Q. Through my attendance at the Sussex Criminal Justice Board I became aware that the rate at which victims of domestic abuse & violence were dropping out of the criminal justice system was particularly high in Sussex. Up until recently this was as high as 29% but recent improvements have seen this figure reduce to 25%. Can you highlight what the key difficulties in this area are?

SUPPLEMENTARY Q:

A) What steps are Sussex Police taking with partner agencies to ensure that these victims are fully supported throughout the process and remain in the criminal justice system?

GY stated that domestic abuse & violence crimes are very complex and challenging and successful outcomes are not always achieved through the courts. GY highlighted that acknowledging these difficulties is essential to understand and ensure that the needs of the victims are put first to better understand their individual needs.

GY confirmed that when it is appropriate to proceed through the courts, attempts have been made to accelerate this process through the criminal justice system. The Sussex Criminal Justice Board have developed an inter-agency action group to look at this area and are working towards reducing the timescales involved to 8 weeks from charge to trial.

VALUE FOR MONEY

VALUE FOR MONEY PROFILE

Q. HMIC's recently published the Value for Money Profile for 2013 which outlines how each of the police forces in England and Wales are providing value for money across their service areas. For Sussex, it highlighted that the costs of police officers are less than the national average but the costs for police staff are above the average. Can you explain why this is?

SUPPLEMENTARY Q's:

A) It was also apparent that Sussex Police has a greater number of sergeants, inspectors and chief inspectors compared to the national average. Do you think that the current supervisory ratios are appropriate in Sussex?

B) The Value for Money Profile also highlighted that the criminal justice costs per charge for Sussex are significantly higher than the national average. Can you explain why these figures are so high for Sussex? And are Sussex Police able to justify these increased costs by demonstrating a greater number of successful prosecutions in terms of those charged?

MB provided some context by explaining that the Value for Money Profile is produced by Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and compares the relative spend across all police forces in England and Wales. MB highlighted that the overall net-spend per head in Sussex has decreased over recent years and is now the fifth lowest.

MB highlighted that the reason for the average costs of police officers being less than the costs of police staff is reflective of the higher number of police staff carrying out certain roles in Sussex. MB also accepted that the supervisory ratios in Sussex are too high and confirmed that work is underway to look at these ratios further.

MB noted that the criminal justice costs per charge were significantly higher than the national average in Sussex and explained that in the majority of areas the costs per function are lower than the average. The main reason for the increased costs across criminal justice relate to the nature of the Private Finance Initiative agreement because all of the custody and financing costs are included in the contract costs. However, MB stated that he expected Sussex Police to be under the national average in the next Value for Money Profile.

MB concluded by highlighting that a better Value for Money Profile can be achieved through increased and further collaboration with Surrey.