

PERFORMANCE & ACCOUNTABILITY MEETING

DATE: 20 March 2020

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

PRESENT: Police & Crime Commissioner – Katy Bourne (KB)
Chief Executive Officer – Mark Streater (MS)
Deputy Chief Constable – Jo Shiner (JS)
Head of Performance – Graham Kane (minutes)

This PAM was not webcast to free up valuable time for senior officers to focus on pressing operational matters in response to the outbreak of the coronavirus.

REASSURANCE TO SUSSEX COMMUNITIES – CORONAVIRUS

With the United Kingdom (UK) facing unprecedented peacetime disruption over the coming weeks people in Sussex are understandably anxious about the advice that has been provided in respect of social distancing; isolation; travel restrictions and access to food and supplies.

A. Can you outline what Sussex Police is doing to support the measures being introduced to tackle the spread of coronavirus?

B. What can the residents of Sussex do to help the Force during this period? For example, we know that the storms earlier this year led to 101 lines getting busier.

C. What is Sussex Police doing to signpost individuals to information about health, travel and other non-police related matters?

D. It has been suggested that being housebound for long periods could increase family tensions with victims of domestic abuse unable to get away. What should victims do at this time?

E. Will police officers be monitoring the community impact of school closures?

F. We have seen a tremendous response from local communities offering support to vulnerable neighbours and those in isolation. Do you have any concerns about this and what advice would you give to older people who may be anxious about unsolicited approaches of help?

G. Whilst many of us will be working from home during the peak of the pandemic, a number of police officers and police staff will still be on the frontline. Do you have sufficient personal protection equipment to support these individuals in their duties?

H. How will Sussex Police support these officers and staff and their families?

I. What impact will the publication of the Coronavirus Bill have on Sussex Police?

J. Is Sussex Police continuing to recruit new police officers during this period?

JS began by reiterating that Public Health England (PHE) is responsible for coordinating the local and national response to COVID-19. It is the role of Sussex Police to support the strategy set by the Government to prevent the further spread of coronavirus (COVID-19). The Force is continuing to assist PHE and other partner agencies with the move from the containment phase to the delay phase in a bid to protect further life and public health.

Operation Apollo is the joint Sussex and Surrey Police response to support the national operation. As the COVID-19 pandemic in the UK continues to develop at a fast pace, the command structure and resources in place throughout both police force areas are continuing to evolve to plan for this changing landscape and to ensure that an effective and resilient police service can be delivered to local communities.

Internally, the Force has introduced social distancing measures to ensure that critical policing functions can be maintained and delivered – this is in line with the advice and guidance provided by PHE and the National Police Chiefs' Council.

Sussex Police is monitoring sickness and self-isolation figures on a daily basis, together with reviewing and amending business continuity plans, to ensure that the Force is able to provide an appropriate response to COVID-19, whilst simultaneously delivering an effective policing service locally.

In addition, the Force is working closely with public service partners through the Sussex Resilience Forum (SRF) to co-ordinate the response for the benefit of local communities. The SRF is jointly chaired by Assistant Chief Constable Dave Miller from Sussex Police and Assistant Chief Fire Officer Mark Andrews from East Sussex Fire & Rescue Service. The SRF is now meeting twice weekly (by tele-conference) to plan, prepare and test resilience. This work included a table-top exercise last week and efforts to ensure that the communication leads for all of the partner organisations remain in continuous contact.

B. What can the residents of Sussex do to help the Force during this period?

The Deputy Chief Constable recognised that the pandemic is worrying for everyone and provided some reassurances that Sussex Police is well-prepared to respond these challenges, in partnership with others.

Police officers, staff and Police Community Support Officers (PCSOs) are continuing to respond to calls for assistance and provide public reassurance. In particular, it was emphasised that members of the public should not have noticed too much difference to the policing service that is currently being provided. It was recognised that this position may change if the challenges presented increase, evolve or the Government changes its strategy. A commitment was made to communicate proactively if any policing services are likely to be delivered in a different way moving forward.

Sussex Police remains focussed on delivering a policing service that is fit-for-purpose for the residents of Sussex and is determined to support partner agencies to deliver their services as part of this work too. Members of the public were asked to support the Force during this period by contacting them online, wherever possible, and not to ask the police to attend unless it is absolutely necessary, as follows:

- Telephone 101 for non-urgent matters, only if you need to speak to someone – otherwise visit the Sussex Police website (<https://www.sussex.police.uk/>).
- Telephone 999 for emergencies ONLY – where someone is in imminent or immediate danger, a crime is in progress or police attendance is required urgently.

The Force has noticed a reduction in the levels of recorded offences across some crime types following the outbreak of COVID-19. It was also emphasised that the Force is developing a Power BI – business analytics tool – to look at how demand has and is continuing to change during this period.

C. What is Sussex Police doing to signpost individuals to information about health, travel and other non-police related matters?

Sussex Police is encouraging members of the public to 'make the right call' and to contact the most appropriate agency for the particular issue or concern that they have. Any individuals who do still contact Sussex Police with requests for information about non-police related matters will be signposted and redirected to the guidance issued by PHE, National Health Service and the Foreign & Commonwealth Office.

Members of the public were reminded about the pressures that these agencies are currently under and were encouraged to be patient. Further information can be viewed through the following links:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/wuhan-novel-coronavirus>

<https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/coronavirus-covid-19/>

<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/travel-advice-novel-coronavirus>

D. Will police officers be monitoring the community impact of school closures?

Sussex Police has a dedicated Children and Young Person Expert Officer who is currently working closely with district commanders, schools, other educational establishments and education authorities to help, support and advise them around the practicalities of school closures. This individual has been moved from the national Children and Young Person portfolio to support the Sussex and Surrey Police response in this area.

The Force is actively monitoring the impact of school closures alongside the education authorities to assess any risks and to identify the most appropriate agencies to respond or make referrals to. KB encouraged Sussex Police to link into the OSPCC for access to the alternative provisions that have been identified and established through the Sussex Early Intervention Youth Programme, REBOOT, that aims to engage positively with those under the age of 18 at risk of committing serious violence, and those who have already come to the attention of the police through anti-social behaviour and low-level crime.

JS concluded by emphasising that the closure of schools is business as usual for the police service with schools being closed for six weeks in the summer each year, albeit in much different circumstances.

E. It has been suggested that being housebound for long periods could increase family tensions with victims of domestic abuse unable to get away. What should victims do at this time?

The Force is "alert and alive" to the fact that increased periods of isolation combined with challenging and stressful circumstances may contribute to an increased risk of domestic abuse. However, there is nothing to suggest that an increase in reports of this crime is apparent at this time.

The Deputy Chief Constable reiterated that domestic abuse is a priority for Sussex Police at any time and reminded individuals about the huge amount of support that is available to victims and their families.

The advice provided to victims remains unchanged: any victims of domestic abuse or children or young people who may have been exposed to it were encouraged to contact the Force by telephone to 101 (for non-urgent calls) or 999 (in an emergency). The advice offered is the same for any individuals at an immediate risk – do not stay at risk in your own home. If necessary, get out of the house and call the police immediately. Sussex Police has highly trained operators who will know how to help and support.

F. We have seen a tremendous response from local communities offering support to vulnerable neighbours and those in isolation. Do you have any concerns about this and what advice would you give to older people who may be anxious about unsolicited approaches of help?

JS acknowledged that there are lots of people who will want to volunteer at this time and recognised the huge amounts of kindness that have already taken place in our communities to help individuals who are self-isolating because of COVID-19 – #viralkindness.

Members of the public were reminded that there is a risk of unscrupulous people taking advantage and exploiting the elderly and vulnerable at this time. Action Fraud, the UK's national fraud reporting service, has already reported scams relating to the coronavirus, including online fraud – with people purchasing imitation Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) and testing kits – and door-to-door criminality – with people posing as health officials or the police to obtain personal data. It was recognised that individuals may seek to try and exploit these uncertain circumstances further moving forward and greater vigilance was encouraged. Further information about Action Fraud can be viewed through the following link: www.actionfraud.police.uk.

The advice given by Sussex Police in respect of fraud has not changed – if it sounds too good to be true, it usually is. Members of the public were reminded not to give their personal details to anyone over the telephone – the banks or police will never ask for this information in this way. Similarly, individuals were reminded that if someone presents themselves at your door and you were either not expecting them or do not know them, follow normal cold calling advice. If it is a friend or neighbour you know who is offering you support or assistance, the risk is lower.

The Deputy Chief Constable encouraged members of the public to share this advice with elderly and vulnerable friends and family and to contact the Force if you become aware of anything untoward happening so that the police can provide an appropriate response. Sussex Police is continuing to monitor this closely through Operation Apollo and is proactively utilising PCSOs and Special Constables, together with delivering clear messaging in partnership with Neighbourhood Watch, to support policing efforts in this area.

G. Whilst many of us will be working from home during the peak of the pandemic, a number of police officers and police staff will still be on the frontline. Do you have sufficient PPE to support these individuals in their duties?

JS confirmed that Sussex Police currently has sufficient PPE for all frontline officers and staff to use. The Force is continuing to provide individuals with up-to-date information and advice in the use of this equipment locally and is closely linked to health colleagues and government agencies nationally. Further PPE has been ordered and is anticipated to be available for use shortly.

It was also highlighted that it might be appropriate for some officers and staff to work remotely and to split up existing teams to minimise the risk of contamination. Reassurance was provided to KB that Sussex Police is well-equipped to respond to the demands and challenges that are currently presenting themselves. The Force remains committed to delivering an efficient and effective police service across Sussex.

H. How will Sussex Police support these officers and staff and their families?

Sussex Police is trying to be as flexible as possible with those police officers and staff with caring responsibilities to ensure that they can continue to contribute towards delivering an effective policing response. The Force is looking to increase the support that is provided to all employees further still.

I. What impact will the publication of the Coronavirus Bill have on Sussex Police?

The details of the new emergency powers to contain the spread of COVID-19 were published in the Coronavirus Bill today (20 March 2020). This has been assessed by Operation Apollo, in combination with Government advice, to ensure that the approach taken in Sussex and Surrey is proportionate, consistent and sustainable. The importance of applying and enforcing these measures with an appropriate policing style was emphasised too.

J. Is Sussex Police continuing to recruit new police officers during this period?

The recruitment of new police officers remains a priority for Sussex Police. The Force is continuing with its planned recruitment at this stage, including the attestation of a number of new police officers earlier this week and making changes to the order of some of the training being delivered to enable some of these officers to be deployed earlier than planned to support policing functions, as required.

The Deputy Chief Constable concluded by stating that she was “incredibly proud” and had been “really impressed” by the level of commitment demonstrated by officers and staff during these challenging and unprecedented times.

Reassurance was provided that Sussex Police will continue to protect members of the public and a few key messages were reaffirmed:

- The Force will be there when you need them.
- Go online first – only contact Sussex Police by telephone if you really need to.
- The Force is working with other partner agencies to keep members of the public safe.
- The policing services provided may have to change but, as and when this happens, the Force will let individuals know how these services will be delivered differently.