

PERFORMANCE & ACCOUNTABILITY MEETING

DATE: 19 June 2020

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

PRESENT: Police & Crime Commissioner – Katy Bourne (KB)
Chief Finance Officer – Iain McCulloch (IMcC)
Temporary Chief Constable – Jo Shiner (JS)
Temporary Deputy Chief Constable – Julia Chapman (JC)
Digital Content Officer – Sammi Carwardine (webcasting)
Head of Performance – Graham Kane (minutes)

REASSURANCE TO SUSSEX COMMUNITIES – CORONAVIRUS

Last month, the Prime Minister confirmed that the five conditions for easing 'lockdown' measures safely had been met sufficiently to ease slightly the restrictions in England.

Sussex Police response to COVID-19, public confidence and hate crime

A. How is Sussex Police continuing to deliver an effective and responsive police service to the residents of Sussex during this period?

B. What operational successes has the Force had during lockdown which have been assisted or enabled by the vast majority of individuals staying at home?

C. What advice, support and policing activity has been provided to businesses targeted during lockdown in Sussex? And how will this approach be amended as the restrictions are eased further?

D. How has Sussex Police responded to reports of excessive or inappropriate speeding and anti-social driving during this period?

E. How is the Force measuring and monitoring public confidence at this time?

F. Has there been an increase in the number of hate crimes recorded against the Asian community in Sussex as a result of COVID-19?

JS began by thanking members of the public for their continued "responsible behaviour" during this period. This sustained compliance with the measures in place has enabled Sussex Police to respond to the pandemic effectively, whilst continuing to tackle criminality and protect the communities of Sussex. The ongoing commitment of all frontline police officers and staff to keep us all safe in challenging and difficult circumstances was also commended.

Assurances were provided to KB that Sussex Police is continuing to deliver an efficient and effective policing responsive to the residents of Sussex during lockdown. The Force is continuing to monitor and assess demand on a daily basis to inform decisions about the operational response provided and the "agile" deployment of police resources

It was highlighted that Sussex Police has had a number of operational successes during lockdown, including tackling 'county lines' criminality – individuals importing illegal drugs into Sussex using dedicated mobile phone lines – and individuals carrying knives or firearms for criminal acts. Reduced traffic on the roads in Sussex, generated by the vast majority of individuals staying at home, has enabled the Force to proactively target those individuals using the roads in Sussex to carry out drug-related activity, resulting in the confiscation and seizure of significant amounts of cash and drugs.

Sussex Police has continued to provide advice and support to businesses and rural communities targeted by criminals during lockdown, increasing the number of engagement opportunities through the greater use of social-media, in particular.

This has also included prioritising rural crimes – tackling commercial burglaries in premises 'other than a dwelling' that criminals have considered unoccupied as a result of the pandemic. This has included a revised commitment to attend any reports of these types of offences during this time which has resulted in a number of arrests being made.

The introduction of a Rural Crime Team at the beginning of the month – comprising more than 20 dedicated officers – together with the establishment of a second Tactical Enforcement Unit – to carry out high-profile disruption and enforcement activity across Sussex – represents a positive commitment to more enforcement and a greater local policing presence.

This work is supported by the use of the 'Disc' system which enables local crime reduction partnerships and businesses to 'self-manage' low-level crimes and anti-social behaviour by reporting any suspicious and criminal activity to the police. This tool is used by approximately 400 rural businesses in Sussex and is contributing towards an improved and targeted approach to intelligence gathering and tasking.

The Temporary Chief Constable explained that Sussex Police understands the impact that excessive or inappropriate speeding and anti-social driving (including vehicle noise from cars and motorbikes caused by illegally fitted exhaust systems) can have on the quality of life in local communities across Sussex, as well as the negative impact it can have on road safety. This driver behaviour has been highlighted further with fewer vehicles on the roads during lockdown.

It was emphasised that the Road Policing Unit (RPU) has continued to plan, target and deploy police resources to target repeat offenders, vehicles, times and locations and tackle the 'fatal four': not wearing a seatbelt, speeding, drink-and-drug-driving and driver distractions, including the use of mobile phones, satellite navigation systems and other devices whilst driving. The information and intelligence received through Operation Crackdown – a joint initiative run by Sussex Police and the Sussex Safer Roads Partnership to provide the communities of Sussex with an opportunity to report specific instances of speeding and anti-social driving – has been used to inform the operational response in this important area.

Further information about Operation Crackdown can be viewed through the following link: www.operationcrackdown.org. Alternatively, if you have any specific information about anti-social driving where the vehicle cannot be identified, this can be reported to Sussex Police via 101 for the RPU or local neighbourhood policing team to review.

JS confirmed that the Force is continuing to deal "robustly" with those individuals driving in excess of the speed limits in place. This has included the complex investigation into the "abhorrent behaviour" of a driver who filmed himself travelling at 201mph on the M23 in Sussex and the subsequent arrest of two individuals. It was also highlighted that there have been more than 10,000 speed camera activations since lockdown began in March 2020 which has resulted in nearly 4,000 individuals completing an online Driver Awareness Course, to educate motorists about their speeding in an attempt to influence positively long-term driver behaviour and attitudes.

The RPU has also continued to deliver Operation Ride – an enforcement operation run throughout the summer months – to target vehicles and motorbikes with illegally fitted equipment, including exhaust systems. Marked and unmarked units, including plain police motorcycles equipped with recording capabilities, patrol roads used frequently by these vehicles. Offending drivers and riders are stopped and their vehicles and bikes are examined – any offences discovered are subject to prosecution through the courts.

Sussex Police has been measuring and monitoring public confidence during lockdown through a number of different sources. This has included feedback received directly from members of the public (either through correspondence or interactions with officers and staff), Independent Advisory Groups (IAGs) that act as a 'critical friend' to the Force and responses received to surveys about the changes to policing services delivered as a result of the pandemic, both in person and online.

JC confirmed that there had been a 25% reduction in hate crime recorded in Sussex since the end of March 2020, including a 13% reduction in hate crimes specifically recorded against those who declare their ethnicity as Asian. These reductions in recorded hate crime are attributed to fewer individuals on the streets and a non-existent night-time economy as a result of the lockdown restrictions currently in place. This position is also reflective of the trends recorded by other police force areas nationally.

The Temporary Deputy Chief Constable concluded by stating that "hate crime will not be tolerated in Sussex" and reiterated a Force committed to tackling these offences through continued engagement with the diverse communities in Sussex and a number of proactive campaigns. This is an area that the Force continues to monitor closely.

Stop and search powers

G. Following the death of George Floyd in America and the global response to the 'Black Lives Matter' movement, how well prepared is the Force for any demonstrations in Sussex?

H. Are you aware of any statues, monuments or sites in Sussex which may be subjected to criminal damage, as demonstrated in Bristol?

I. In the rolling year period to 31 May 2020, there were 7,625 stop and searches in Sussex – an increase of 841 more searches in comparison to last year (+12%). What do you attribute the increases in the use of this power to?

J. What measures are in place to ensure that every stop and search is appropriate, proportionate and justified?

K. Of all the individuals searched, those who identify themselves as Black and Minority Ethnic were 2.4 times more likely to be stopped and those who identify themselves as Black were 9.8 times more likely to be stopped in Sussex. What do you attribute this apparent disproportionality to?

L. What scrutiny and accountability arrangements are in place to ensure that the use of stop and search powers in Sussex are effective, fair and lawful?

M. How consistent is the use of body worn video to record stop and search encounters?

N. What training is provided to police officers in the powers of stop and search? And how frequently does this training take place?

O. What work has the Force undertaken to monitor community tensions since the outbreak of the pandemic?

P. What does the Sussex Police response look like to support these and any other victims of hate crime during this period?

JC began by confirming that Sussex Police is "well-prepared" for any protests, demonstrations or gatherings that might take place in Sussex. This is a result of the Force having a proven track-record for policing successfully these types of events in the past. Efficient and effective planning during the initial stages of the pandemic ensured that the Force was quick to plan and manage the small number of Extinction Rebellion demonstrations established to protest against the restrictions on movement imposed by the Government in response to COVID-19.

Following the death of George Floyd and the increased number of Black Lives Matter (BLM) demonstrations organised locally, Sussex Police established Operation Newbarn to coordinate the policing response. It was emphasised that a significant BLM demonstration took place in Brighton last weekend (13 June 2020), attended by between 10,000 and 15,000 individuals. Thanks were expressed to all participants on behalf of Sussex Police for their patience, support and co-operation to ensure that the protests were managed and delivered safely. It was also highlighted that the feedback received from members of the public had been positive regarding the policing style, approach and methodology used to safeguard those taking part in the BLM demonstrations. This included the use of Protest Liaison Officers (PLOs) to remind individuals of their personal responsibilities to adhere to the current social distancing measures.

It was noted that smaller BLM demonstrations took place in Chichester, Eastbourne and Steyning too and that each event passed without incident. The Force is routinely scanning social media sources and engaging with organisers to understand better whether any further demonstrations are planned. This proactive approach to information and intelligence gathering aims to ensure that any future demonstrations can be made as safe as possible for anyone in attendance.

The Temporary Deputy Chief Constable confirmed that there are no statues, monuments or sites in Sussex that have been highlighted as being at any risk of criminal damage. The local authorities have also reviewed each of these and the personal heritage associated with local businesses too. It was highlighted that any criminal damage that is caused to these sites would be dealt with robustly by Sussex Police.

JC explained that stop and search is one of a number of useful tactics used by police officers to prevent and detect crime effectively and to keep people safe in Sussex. Police officers have the power to stop and search any individual if they have 'reasonable grounds' to suspect that they are carrying illegal drugs, a weapon, stolen property or something that could be used to commit a crime. The significance of using these powers responsibly – to build and maintain public trust and confidence in the police – was emphasised, including an ongoing commitment to review the Force's approach to this.

The 12% increase in the use of this power in Sussex (equivalent to 841 more searches in comparison to last year) was attributed to police officers having greater confidence in the use of it. The figures also included an additional 475 stop and searches that were carried out as part of Operation Foreland – the Sussex and Surrey Police response to international Hells Angels motorcycle ride that took place across both police force areas in June 2019 and was attended by more than 3,000 motorcyclists.

The Temporary Deputy Chief Constable provided KB with assurances that a comprehensive quality assurance system is in place within Sussex Police to ensure that every stop and search carried out is appropriate, proportionate and justified. The Force works towards the national 'Best Use of Stop and Search Scheme' to ensure greater transparency, accountability and community involvement, through a more intelligence-led approach. Every stop and search record in Sussex is assessed, with additional 'dip checks' in place to ensure it is justified and likely to have a positive outcome in reducing crime.

The overall governance in this area is provided through a quarterly 'Legitimacy and Ethics Board', chaired by Assistant Chief Constable Dave Miller and attended by officers, staff and independent advisors. The Board provides an internal audit of the stop and search encounters looking at the proportionality of the searches conducted, compliance against the legislation and the supervisory measures in place around its use.

Sussex Police also has a Stop and Search Independent Scrutiny Panel that aims to improve the trust and confidence of communities by providing members of the public with the opportunity to quality assure the use of these powers in Sussex. The Panel looks at all stop and search records and considers whether any disproportionality exists in terms of the individuals stopped and searched, assesses the lawfulness of the grounds, geographic locations and frequencies of the searches and the use of Body Worn Video (BWV) during the searches. The outcomes of the stop and search encounters, any complaints received by the Force and training needs identified are also considered by the Panel, with feedback provided to individual officers and supervisors, retrospectively, as required. Sussex Police also has a separate 'Rewind' campaign – aimed at younger people – to inform members of the public about their rights when stopped by police. Further information about Rewind, the Stop and Search Independent Scrutiny Panel and some of the different ways to become involved can all be viewed through the following link: www.sussex.police.uk/police-forces/sussex-police/areas/au/about-us/stop-and-search/

In addition, the use of stop and search is considered at the Divisional Accountability Meetings on each of the three policing divisions and at monthly supervisor meetings to look at the quality of the grounds for each search, whether a 'receipt' is provided for any search carried out, the conduct of the searching officer and the use of BWV.

JC confirmed that Sussex Police understands the significance that any negative perceptions around the disproportionate use of stop and search can have on members of the public, something that is recognised to be an issue for policing locally and nationally. The Force is determined to ensure that each stop and search interaction with a member of the public is conducted fairly, lawfully and ethically. Sussex Police remains resolute in its commitment to build on the established engagement it has with local Black, Asian, and Minority Ethnic (BAME) communities and is examining its stop and search processes, alongside the use of other policing powers, to better understand the outcomes.

The Temporary Deputy Chief Constable concluded by stating that Sussex Police is continuously looking to improve their approach to stop and search. The use of these powers is reviewed regularly to ensure that they remain proportionate and fit-for-purpose. It was recognised that whilst more work still needs to be done in this area, the Force is well-positioned to build on all of the positive scrutiny and accountability arrangements that are in place locally around the use of stop and search powers in Sussex.

It was highlighted that BWV is routinely available to most frontline police officers and PCSOs. The Sussex Police policy for stop and search sets out an expectation that each interaction should be routinely recorded whenever an officer or a PCSO is equipped with this technology. As part of the quality assurance processes, supervisors are required to review, sample and sign-off BWV footage of stop and search encounters and to ensure that each of these interactions has been recorded accurately.

It was highlighted that a range of different training is provided to police officers in the powers of stop and search. For existing officers, refreshed training has been provided to them in the legitimate and fair use of stop and search powers as well as a practical input on its application through a specific input at the annual staff safety training. New officers are taught all about the power through a combination of classroom and online-based training, including a series of role play examples. These recruits are also required to carry out successfully a number of stop and searches before their Independent Patrol (IP) status is awarded.

Further equality and diversity training in respect of understanding better 'unconscious bias' and 'reflective practice' is provided to officers and staff through a combination of classroom and online e-learning courses delivered through the National Centre for Applied Learning Technologies (NCALT). Any new and additional updates and learning is routinely shared with the workforce through the internal intranet. In addition, the Organisational Learning Board is used by Sussex Police to capture any trends or themes that are identified across the Force, including stop and search encounters. This learning is then shared with all of the other police force areas in England and Wales.

Sussex Police has continued to monitor community tensions since the outbreak of the pandemic through regular assessments on each of the three policing divisions to highlight any areas of concern. The thoughts and feelings from the communities in Sussex are captured by police officers and PCSOs as part of their patrols, through discussions at IAGs and through social media and correspondence received by the Force. It was emphasised that this work is led on by Chief Inspectors locally and is coordinated and managed centrally.

Sussex Police is continuing to support and prioritise the investigations of hate crime during this period because of the detrimental impact it can have on a victim. This includes carrying out timely hate crime risk assessments to ensure that individuals remain safe at their homes and places of work and making referrals to relevant support services, as required. It is recognised that hate crime remains under-reported and Superintendent Katy Woolford – Sussex Police lead officer for hate crime – will continue to raise awareness of what hate crime is, how to report it and the support that is available from Sussex Police and partners.

Domestic Abuse

Q. Sussex Police has recorded an increase in the number of victims of domestic abuse who had not reported these offences prior to lockdown. What is the Force doing to inform victims that the police can support them, as well as reaching out to those victims who are still not ready to contact the police?

R. Similarly, what is Sussex Police doing to support repeat victims of domestic abuse who may require discreet support in order to avoid further risk of abuse?

S. Has there been an increase in the number of reports of domestic abuse involving children following the closures of schools in March?

T. What other hidden-harm crimes have increased since lockdown?

U. There is some previous evidence of a link between sporting events and increases in domestic abuse. How prepared is Sussex Police for the potential impact that the return of sporting events could have on victims of domestic abuse with restrictions on movement are still in place?

JC explained that the restrictions put in place to restrict the spread of COVID-19 with individuals encouraged to stay at home could have potentially contributed to increased tensions and frictions within households, culminating in a greater number of domestic abuse crimes and incidents taking place.

It was also recognised that not all of these victims may have been ready or in a position to report these offences to the police. The importance of Sussex Police reaching out to these individuals to provide support, assistance and access to specialist support services for them or others who may have been subjected to this abuse was highlighted. The Force has endeavoured to provide proactive and consistent messages to members of the public through a range of different and discreet formats, including: a series of banners in supermarkets; printed messages on the bags used by pharmacies; advertising in local newspapers and the production of revised leaflets. This approach is anticipated to have had a positive impact on encouraging first-time victims to report this domestic abuse.

It was also highlighted that Sussex Police received 307 fewer reports of domestic abuse from repeat victims during the 12 week period of lockdown, in comparison to the 12 week period before.

As mentioned last month, Sussex Police is one of only four police force areas – alongside Devon and Cornwall Police, North Yorkshire Police and the Metropolitan Police Service – to have been invited to take part in the Home Office 'deep dive' into the policing response to domestic abuse during the pandemic. The learning taken away from this initiative is expected to inform and improve the understanding of how individuals respond in this type of eventuality. This should enable a more agile and flexible policing response to be delivered, with a greater appreciation for the management of demand.

The Temporary Deputy Chief Constable confirmed that there had been a 2% increase in the number of reports of domestic abuse involving children during lockdown. This is attributed to a greater potential for children to be at home and witness to domestic abuse offences during this time and the better recognition of risk by officers following the 'Think Child' campaign and Forcewide messaging encouraging attending officers to consider the voice of the child.

Operation Encompass directly connects the police with schools to secure better outcomes for children who are subject to or witness to police-attended incidents of domestic abuse. Sussex Police has continued the practice of providing this information to schools and other educational establishments throughout lockdown to ensure that they remain aware of any historical reports that have taken place ahead of the children starting to return to education. This will enable the school and other educational establishment to ensure that the child receives the additional support or attention that is required, as appropriate. Multi-agency partnership working has continued to be delivered throughout the pandemic to safeguard these children further.

It was also highlighted that as part of the Sussex Local Resilience Forum (LRF) response to COVID-19, the Tactical Coordinating Cell for 'Volunteers' has worked closely with those that interact with children and families to provide them with additional training to support them with forming judgements, making reports, raising any concerns or highlighting where any additional support might be required from the local authorities, during a period of reduced interactions with schools and other educational establishments.

Through the precept investment in 2020/21, Sussex Police has introduced a Domestic Abuse Local Resolution Team to respond to low-risk, non-urgent reports of domestic abuse. The dedicated and bespoke team comprises specialist officers who have each been trained to respond exclusively to domestic abuse crimes and incidents. Following triage, the team endeavour to make contact with victims of domestic abuse within 24 hours and to make an appointment within 48 hours of initial contact, either in person or through the innovative use of technology. This includes the use of either a discreet text message (with no association to the police) or a video conferencing tool, enabling individuals to make contact with the police on their own terms. It was also emphasised that neither of these platforms leave a trace on the victim's mobile telephone or computer to protect them further still.

This approach enables victims to receive personal contact from a police officer, with further signposting to specialist support services, as required. Initial feedback from victims of domestic abuse has been "overwhelmingly positive" with 96% of victims considering that the attending officer from the Local Resolution Team discussed their safety concerns in full with them. In addition, the creation of this team has enabled response officers to spend more of their time responding to other reports of crime and incidents in communities across Sussex. More importantly, this dedicated team means that victims of domestic abuse now receive an improved response in terms of consistency and continuity.

JC confirmed that previous research has identified a link between sporting events and an increase in domestic abuse, particularly when there is an increase in the intake of alcohol. However, no such correlation has been identified in Sussex and, as domestic abuse continues to remain a priority for Sussex Police, no additional measures are required to safeguard victims as sporting events start to resume in the UK.

It was highlighted that there has been an increase in stalking and harassment offences recorded since lockdown commenced. This is an area that the Force continues to tackle robustly through the use of Stalking Protection Orders (SPOs). Introduced by the Stalking Protection Act 2019, SPOs provide the police service with an earlier formal intervention to improve the safety of all stalking victims. It was highlighted that, since their introduction earlier this year, Sussex Police has issued 19 SPOs to protect individuals from this offending behaviour and to safeguard them better should any breaches of the SPO occur.

Public contact and resilience

V. Can you please provide me with the latest figures for emergency and non-emergency call handling times and 'non-voice' demand?

W. What do the sickness and self-isolation rates currently look like for police officers, police staff and Police Community Support Officers (PCSOs) in Sussex?

X. How are you monitoring the health and wellbeing of officers and staff working from home, including the identification of the requirement for any additional support?

The Temporary Chief Constable was "delighted" to confirm that Sussex Police has continued to deliver a consistent and sustained performance in respect of call handling times (for both emergency and non-emergency calls) and non-voice demand (emails, webforms and online reports).

The average waiting times for emergency calls in the past four weeks remained consistent at less than 10 seconds for 97% of all emergency calls received and less than 3 minutes for all non-emergency calls received, with reduced numbers of abandoned calls recorded too. This represents a significant improvement from the 10 minutes and 13 seconds average non-emergency call handling times recorded in the rolling year period to 31 May 2019 (with 31% of calls abandoned) to an average of 3 minutes and 31 seconds (and 14% of calls abandoned) for the same rolling year period in 2020. The non-voice demand has replaced some of the call demand, with significant increases apparent in the number of reports received by the Force, including a large proportion that relate to breaches of COVID-19 measures and other restrictions in place. JS stated that there is no reason for Force performance in this area to decline as a result of lockdown restrictions continuing to be eased further still.

Sussex Police is continuing to monitor sickness and self-isolation figures on a daily basis. The Force currently has an abstraction rate of less than 6% for police officers, with 2.5% of officers absent through sickness and 2.7% self-isolating and available for duty. Similar figures are also apparent for police staff (including PCSOs) with just over 6% absent from work through a combination of sickness (2.7%) and self-isolation (3.7%). These figures continue to be lower than normal for police officers, staff and PCSOs.

The health and wellbeing of police officers and staff remains a priority for Sussex Police during this time. JS recognised the importance of the Force "stepping-up" its response in this area to make a number of adjustments to protocols, processes and procedures. This is particularly important in respect of the increased number of assaults and threats of COVID-19 transmission that police officers have been subjected to throughout the pandemic.

Other examples of monitoring the health and wellbeing of officers and staff working from home included the daily monitoring of teams and effective supervision and the establishment of an 'advice line' (available inside and outside working hours) to provide advice about testing arrangements, self-isolation, financial considerations and risk of transmission to family and friends. The Force has also endeavoured to provide officers and staff with information through their internal Intranet page, including health and wellbeing blogs about fitness, nutrition, mental health initiatives, working from home with young children and dependents and health and safety. Sussex Police has been supported and assisted by Police Federation and Unison in this area.

Personal Protective Equipment and Expenditure

Y. Does Sussex Police still have sufficient Personal Protective Equipment for all frontline officers and staff to use, as was reported last month?

Z. What is the total amount of additional costs incurred by Sussex Police to date in response to the pandemic? And what further costs are anticipated to be incurred over the next few months?

AA. Conversely, have there been any savings realised over the same period?

AB. How long will Operation Apollo continue to run for?

The Deputy Chief Constable remained confident that there is a "sufficient" supply of PPE for all frontline police officers and staff to use and the Force is continuing to monitor its reserve stocks on a daily basis. It was highlighted that a rolling 21 day purchase plan has been agreed to ensure that demand remains sufficient should a 'second wave' of the Coronavirus occur later this year. This approach also ensures that the Force is not overspending unnecessarily.

The financial impact of COVID-19 on all police force areas is likely to be significant. Sussex Police is continuing to monitor regularly its financial planning and additional expenditure incurred as a result of the policing response to the pandemic through bespoke budget codes aligned to Operation Apollo.

Sussex Police incurred net additional costs of £3.6m during March and April 2020 related to their response to COVID-19. The Force estimates that a further net £1.6m will be incurred during May and June 2020, bringing the total cost to £5.2m, excluding the Sussex Police share of the national procurement of PPE.

The Association of Police & Crime Commissioners (APCC) and the National Police Chiefs' Council (NPCC) have made representations to the Home Office for the costs incurred to be reimbursed in full.

Conversely, it was reported that total savings of just under £500,000 had been achieved by Sussex Police, as at 31 May 2020. This included reductions in the external training costs and premises utilities and savings that have been generated in respect of travel expenses and fuel costs. The Force is also looking at how it can operate differently in the future and 'learning the lessons' from COVID-19.

It is anticipated that Operation Apollo – the joint Sussex and Surrey Police response to support the national Public Health England (PHE) response to COVID-19 – will continue to run until the 'COVID Alert Level' in the UK reduces to Level 2 ("no or minimal social-distancing measures") or Level 1 on the five point scale ("COVID-19 is not known to be present in the UK").

In the meantime, the Force will continue to deliver flexible and proportionate policing, responsive to the needs of the public and the types and trends of criminality reported.

NEXT UP:

The next Performance & Accountability Meeting is on Friday, 31 July 2020 at 13:00. Further information can be viewed through the following link:

www.sussex-pcc.gov.uk/get-involved/watch-live/