

PERFORMANCE & ACCOUNTABILITY MEETING

DATE: 26 July 2013

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

PRESENT: Police & Crime Commissioner Katy Bourne (KB)
Deputy Police & Crime Commissioner Steve Waight
Chief Executive Mark Streater
Chief Finance Officer John Eagles
Chief Constable Martin Richards (MR)
Assistant Chief Constable Robin Smith (RS)
Director of Finance Mark Baker (MB)
Policy Officer Graham Kane – minutes
Communications Manager Rosie Gooch
Detective Sergeant James Pateman

INTRODUCTION

Q. As you are aware, HMIC published last week the national 'Valuing the Police' report for police forces in England and Wales setting out how the service has responded to the demands of the spending review and looking ahead to the challenges of the next. As part of this, Sussex Police has received its own progress report, which I am keen to use this meeting to explore its findings.

MR explained that he was pleased with the overall content of the recently published HMIC report 'Valuing the Police', which highlighted many positives for Sussex Police. He explained that Sussex remains one of the safest county's to live in the country, with 12% fewer recorded crimes compared to last year and that the Force are ahead of their savings targets. However, MR expressed concern over the Force's response to emergency calls and general calls to 101.

PUBLIC CONFIDENCE

RESPONSE TIMES

Q. The biggest area of concern in the HMIC report is the deterioration in the Force's response to emergency calls. Over the past three years the response to emergency Grade 1 calls has dropped by 12% and the response to Grade 2 calls has dropped by 10%. This is clearly of concern to the public relying on the service.

A) What has caused the deterioration in response times?

B) How do you intend to improve these response times?

MR explained that there has been an increase in the number of calls and incidents reported to Sussex Police which has had an impact on demand. It was established that the reductions in response times are consistent across East Sussex, West Sussex and Brighton & Hove divisions.

A contributing factor towards the deterioration in the Force's response to emergency calls has been attributed to the introduction of a new system which is still being reviewed and understood. It was reported that a working group has been established to monitor this progress.

MR stated that the Force continues to receive a positive response from the public, and that public opinion is not reflective of the current response time performance figures. It was also highlighted that an increase in calls could be credited to an increase in public confidence and trust in the police.

FRONTLINE POLICING

Q. The 'Valuing the Police' report states that Sussex Police is planning to decrease the overall proportion of its workforce in frontline roles, as defined by HMIC.

A) What assurances can you provide that this will not damage the service provided to the public?

B) How will you ensure that the Force maintains an effective frontline crime fighting capability?

MR explained that approximately 60% of all officers and staff can be categorised as frontline policing within Sussex Police. This visibility includes police officers, police community support officers and special constables. It was highlighted that the Force's definition of frontline policing differs from that of HMIC and that Sussex are positioned third in terms of the national average.

MR provided assurances that Sussex Police would maintain an effective crime fighting capability by working more efficiently through more sophisticated use of mobile technology, availability of online reporting and changes to the locations of police stations. MR would like Sussex Police to be judged collectively in terms of performance figures, public satisfaction and quality of service provided.

101

Q. The percentage of non emergency calls answered within 60 seconds has fallen from 74% across 2012/2013, to 52% across 2013/2014 to date. This is of considerable concern to me.

A) Can you outline what measures you have put in place to ensure that the public calling in receive a better service?

B) What timescales have you put in place for the Force to return to the previous strong performance?

MR acknowledged that a performance issue exists in terms of the non emergency calls answered within 60 seconds and explained that this is the result of the introduction of a new data management system. It was demonstrated that there has been an increase in the average call duration and that the contact centre will receive extra investment including an increase in the number of call handling staff.

MR explained that Sussex Police have benefited from the learning of other forces that have already implemented this system, but still anticipate that the Force is unlikely to be back to the previous levels of performance until the end of the year, which will allow time for the new system to bed in. It was agreed that additional reassurance to the public regarding this progress should be communicated by the Force. MR concluded by stating that 999 call answering performance has been maintained and continues to exceed the Force target.

STOP & SEARCH POWERS

Q. In the recently published HMIC report into 'Stop and Search Powers' it was encouraging to see that Sussex Police was one of the better performing forces for not using the powers excessively and achieving a high percentage of successful outcomes when they are used.

A) What measures are you putting in place to ensure that every stop and search is justified and is likely to have a positive outcome in reducing crime?

B) How can you be sure that there is no disproportionality in those individuals subject to stop and search?

MR was delighted that the HMIC report into 'Stop and Search Powers' demonstrated that Sussex Police was one of the better performing forces for not using the powers excessively and achieving a high percentage of successful outcomes when they are used.

He stated that stop and searches are an effective crime fighting tool, which engage with the public and increase police visibility. It was explained that Sussex Police carried out more than 20,000 stop and searches in the past year and received only 4 complaints. MR provided assurances that Sussex Police officers would remain focussed to ensure that all stop and searches are professionally carried out by regularly reviewing feedback from the public and internal review teams. It was also understood that Sussex compare favourably in terms of proportionality in those subject to stop and search.

LEADERSHIP

Q. HMIC make a specific comment in the 'Valuing the Police' report, and I quote, "senior leaders (in Sussex Police) struggle to articulate how the range of sometimes seemingly disjointed activities, will result in an efficient and effective organisation that is well placed to meet the challenges of the next spending review period".

A) Why would HMIC be given this impression?

B) What assurances can you give me that the senior leadership in Sussex Police is clear and decisive on meeting the future challenges?

MR stated that there was no evidence in the body of the HMIC report to qualify the above statement and informed the meeting that he has asked HMIC to clarify this position and is still waiting for a response. He provided assurances that Sussex Police have clear plans to improve services provided to the residents of Sussex by modernising the workforce and workplace, closer working with partners and through further collaboration with Surrey Police.

It was explained that a staff survey into Serving Sussex 2015 has established that staff within Sussex Police want greater clarity in terms of what the future challenges look like which prompted MR to acknowledge that perhaps Sussex Police have not been as effective in communicating these plans as they could have been.

FIREARMS LICENSING

Q. When I first took office in November, it was brought to my attention that there was a backlog in terms of the processing of licenses within the Firearms & Explosives Licensing Unit at Sussex Police. After raising this as an issue with the Chief Constable I am delighted to report that the backlog in the unit has now been cleared.

A) What assurances can you give me that these current levels of performance will be maintained?

MR explained that Sussex Police have made changes to their processes and recruited extra staff to clear the backlog in the Firearms & Explosives Licensing Unit. The Unit are expecting the workload to treble in September and expressed that there is a shared responsibility to process the applications in a timely manner from both a safety perspective and to minimise disruption to business and social users.

MB explained that there are proposals to increase the firearms licensing fees which would provide additional resources for Sussex Police. These could then be reinvested into the Unit to increase the staffing levels and improve performance in terms of the service levels provided, through the development of online application and payment facilities. MB agreed to carry out some further research to understand the additional costs to Sussex Police for carrying out additional medical checks on license holders in line with national guidance and protocol.

CRIME & COMMUNITY SAFETY

VISIBILITY

Q. The HMIC report 'Valuing the Police' recognises that people in Sussex feel safer in the areas that they live compared to two years ago which is commendable.

A) Can you explain the success factors behind this?

B) How do Sussex Police intend to build upon this further?

MR welcomed the findings of the report and recognised that further reductions in crime are a contributing factor to the people in Sussex feeling safer in the areas that they live compared to two years ago. The HMIC report made reference to Sussex Police maintaining the number of neighbourhood policing teams and police community support officers and MR emphasised the value of and investing in strong neighbourhood policing to ensure that the public are at the heart of everything that Sussex Police do.

MR stated that Sussex Police will look to build upon this through further engagement with the public to better understand where improvements to the customer experience can be made and through continued embedding of cultural changes.

RECORDED CRIME

Q. The report further states that recorded crime in Sussex has reduced slower than other areas across England and Wales.

A) What are the reasons for this?

MR highlighted that recorded crime in Sussex has reduced consecutively for the past eight years and in 2013/2014 to date there have been 12% fewer crimes recorded compared to last year. It was demonstrated that Sussex are placed second out of their most similar group of eight forces in terms of recorded crime. MR explained that the slower reductions of recorded crime for Sussex detailed in the report could be attributable to Sussex Police working from a lower base than the other forces and highlighted the importance of looking at the long term reductions in crime.

BURGLARY

Q. Although the overall trend for burglary across the Force is reducing, the short term increases in recorded crimes has been a concern, particularly in Brighton & Hove, and Operation Magpie has been launched to counter this.

A) Why do recorded levels of burglary in Brighton & Hove remain higher than other parts of Sussex?

B) What impact is Operation Magpie now having on burglary crime?

MR recognised that Sussex Police have experienced a dip in the levels of performance relating to burglaries and explained that Operation Magpie has been introduced to tackle this which has demonstrated early improvement to this area of performance. Action and activity to date has resulted in 71 arrests in three weeks, including two repeat offenders who are thought to be responsible for multiple burglary crimes. There has also been a reduction of 51 recorded crimes of burglary in June compared to May.

It was highlighted that Brighton & Hove presents its own unique challenges for Sussex Police, in comparison to East and West Sussex, including many multi-occupancy buildings, the student population of two universities and a higher percentage of individuals with substance addictions.

RS confirmed that distraction burglaries are also a high priority for Sussex Police and that intelligence is regularly shared with neighbouring police forces because of the cross-border nature of these crimes. He acknowledged that partners need to be involved in the process to deliver longer term reductions in burglary.

DOMESTIC ABUSE

Q. The HMIC report 'Valuing the Police' states that 85% of victims were satisfied with the overall service provided, which is broadly in line with the figure for England and Wales.

A) In respect of the victim experience, where do you see the main areas for improvement for Sussex Police and its criminal justice system partners?

MR acknowledged the positive content of the report but appreciated that further improvements to service levels can be made to ensure that the victim remains at the heart of everything that Sussex Police do.

The speed at which it takes to process offenders through the crown prosecution service and court availability were identified as current challenges where improvements could be made to improve the customer experience. It was understood that Sussex Police are already working with them to accelerate this process.

It was also highlighted that Community Resolutions have been embraced in Sussex to give victims a number of options to suit them in achieving a desired outcome, without having to go through the courts, which will have a positive impact on the above.

Q. I would like to thank you for your support in achieving White Ribbon status to end violence against women. My intentions for White Ribbon are that in three years time it will mean something to every police officer in Sussex.

B) How do you plan to share this vision across the Force?

MR confirmed that Sussex Police were the first force in England and Wales to achieve White Ribbon status which was a reflection of strategy and processes already in place. Sussex Police will continue to demonstrate that this work is a key part of the policing service in Sussex by providing more information and support to staff and through promoting the benefits of early intervention.

SPECIAL CONSTABLES

Q. As you know, one of my commitments is to increase the number of Special Constables to 450 by November 2015.

A) Can you give me an update on the progress made to date?

Q. The attrition rates of Special Constables can be high and I am aware that a number of existing Specials are applying to become regular officers. As you know, I have also put in place arrangements to refund the policing element of the Council Tax for Special Constables in Sussex.

B) What measures are you putting in place to ensure that the recruitment and retention programme is sufficiently resilient?

MR confirmed that Sussex Police have approximately 350 special constables and are confident of exceeding the target of 450 by November 2013 set by the Commissioner in her Police & Crime Plan. It was acknowledged that the attrition rates for special

constables are higher than the Force would like them to be because a number of special constables have ambitions to become regular police officers, which has also recently opened for recruitment. Changes have been made to the emphasis of the recruitment process to reflect this.

MB also clarified that the process for refunding the policing element of the Council Tax to special constables is still being finalised and is expected to be processed in September.

ESTATES STRATEGY

Q. We've conducted a complete review to ensure that the Sussex Police estate is fit for purpose and fit for the future.

A) What assurances can you provide to the residents of Sussex that the levels of service provided will not be compromised despite the planned closures and subsequent sales of police stations across the county?

B) How will you keep the residents of Sussex fully sighted on the changes as they develop?

MB stated that at the heart of the estates strategy is a commitment to the public and reassured the residents of Sussex that no service will be removed as part of the planned closures of police stations without a similar or better alternative in place. He emphasised that any savings from the subsequent sales of the police stations would be reinvested in policing. MR acknowledged that Sussex Police need to be proactive in terms of communication and local engagement with residents as the changes develop.

ANY OTHER BUSINESS

COLLABORATION

RS stated that there is a shared ambition between the Police & Crime Commissioners and Chief Constables for Sussex and Surrey to accelerate the collaboration between the two forces. It was explained that a key feature of the Terms of Reference is to drive out savings whilst delivering the same or an enhanced level of service. He also reported that there is an aspiration to have a lead force delivery for Operations and Specialist Crime by 1 October 2013.

STRATEGIC POLICING REQUIREMENT

MR confirmed that Sussex Police had recently fulfilled national commitments to the Strategic Policing Requirement (SPR) to send officers to the G8 protests in London and the marches in Northern Ireland. It was explained that this has naturally had an impact on resources and has provided additional challenges for the Force. It was also emphasised that the SPR is a reciprocal arrangement for providing and receiving support which has assisted Sussex Police on previous occasions, including the St George's Day protests in Brighton & Hove.