

PERFORMANCE & ACCOUNTABILITY MEETING

DATE: 17 April 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)
Chief Constable – Giles York (GY)
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 coronavirus pandemic ****

REASSURANCE TO SUSSEX COMMUNITIES – CORONAVIRUS

With the 'lockdown' in the United Kingdom (UK) extended by (at least) another three weeks, I would once again like to thank everyone on the frontline who is selflessly helping in the fight against the coronavirus. We can all play our part by staying at home and cooperating as fully as possible with the restrictions in place so as not to put any unnecessary strain on our emergency services.

Public confidence and reassurance

A. Sussex Police has well-established contingency plans in place for dealing with major incidents, including pandemics. What assurances can you provide members of the public that the Force is doing all it can to support the measures introduced to tackle the spread of coronavirus?

B. Can you provide me with an update regarding emergency (999) and non-emergency (101) call handling performance during this time?

C. Do you have any messages that you would like to get across to the residents of Sussex that will assist the Force during this difficult period?

GY began by reiterating that it is the role of Sussex Police to protect the critical care capacity of the National Health Service (NHS) and to support the strategy set by the Government to prevent the further spread of coronavirus (COVID-19) by delivering a responsive policing service. Public Health England (PHE) remains responsible for coordinating the local and national response to COVID-19. Operation Apollo is the joint Sussex and Surrey Police response to support the national operation.

It was emphasised that there has been a significant reduction in demand to both the emergency and non-emergency telephone numbers during this period, with 999 calls reducing by 9% and 101 calls reducing by 15%. The average waiting times were less than 10 seconds for emergency calls (on 97% of occasions) and 3 minutes and 52 seconds for non-emergency calls.

This call demand has "shifted" online with an 11% increase in the 'non-voice' demand received (including emails, webforms and online reports) through the Single Online Home (SOH). This includes more than 7,700 online contacts received in the past week, comprising of 3,340 emails and more than 4,400 webforms, of which 2,700 reports related to breaches of COVID-19 'Stay at Home' measures and other restrictions.

It is anticipated that the volume of non-voice demand will be greater in the police force areas that use the SOH capability. This is because the SOH platform has a bespoke form that enables members of public to report possible breaches. This form can be viewed through the following link:

<https://www.sussex.police.uk/tua/tell-us-about/c19/tell-us-about-possible-breach-coronavirus-measures/>

It was highlighted that the volume of reports increased throughout England and Wales over the Easter Bank Holiday weekend with more than 50,000 reports received and most of these relating to breaches of measures. This is in comparison to the 80,000 reports that are usually received through SOH in an average calendar month.

The provision of a facility to submit online reports through the SOH was recognised to have been a contributing factor behind the Force being able to maintain call handling performance. Each of the reports received through this platform is triaged for severity and the realistic potential for a positive intervention, with a response usually provided within 48 hours.

Sussex Police is following the national policing approach to COVID-19 and the Chief Constable confirmed that, thankfully, most members of the public understand the implications of what the guidelines are seeking to achieve. The small numbers of individuals who are not staying at home during this time are increasing the risk to themselves, their family, friends and others. This behaviour is also exposing police officers, staff and other emergency service workers on the frontline to unnecessary risks.

KB was informed that police officers in Sussex continue to receive a "huge amount of public support" during their many interactions with local communities and are able to use their discretion to take a proportionate response to any possible breaches. The process of engagement, explanation and encouragement are used as part of this interaction in the first instance, with the Force only moving on to enforcement as a last resort, if required.

Additional enforcement powers

D. The Coronavirus Act 2020 introduced additional enforcement powers for the police service. Can you set out exactly what these new powers are?

E. Has Sussex Police been required to use these powers and, if so, how many Fixed Penalty Notices (FPNs) have been issued in Sussex?

F. How does this compare with other police force areas with similar coastal borders and beauty spots?

G. How will you ensure that these powers are used appropriately, proportionately and consistently throughout Sussex?

GY explained that there are five main summary offences created by the legislation. A person commits an offence if they:

- fail without reasonable excuse to comply with any direction, reasonable instruction, requirement or restriction;*
- abscond, or attempt to abscond, while being removed to or kept at a place of detention or isolation;*
- knowingly provide false or misleading information in response to a requirement to provide information;*
- obstruct a person who is exercising or attempting to exercise a power; and*
- fail without reasonable excuse to ensure that a child they have responsibility for complies with any direction, instruction, requirement or restriction given to or imposed on the child, or to provide such information and assistance in relation to the child as is reasonably necessary and practicable in the circumstances.*

KB was informed that Sussex Police had issued a total of 163 Fixed Penalty Notices (FPNs) between 27 March and 13 April 2020. In particular, it was highlighted that 135 FPNs were issued over the Easter Bank Holiday weekend, with more than 61% of these issued to individuals who reside outside of Sussex. Surrey Police issued 205 FPNs over the same period but it was acknowledged to be too early to compare these figures with other police force areas.

The relatively low number of FPNs issued in Sussex was considered to a positive reflection of both public compliance with the measures and restrictions and the policing style and approach used by Sussex Police. The Chief Constable explained that the Force would continue to "police by consent", wherever possible, utilising the trust, support and assistance of local communities, only using the new powers when they are required.

KB was reassured to note that an Inspector must be updated each time a FPN is issued in Sussex – this approach provides an immediate "check and balance". All FPN activity in the past 24 hours is reviewed at the Daily Management Meetings at a district, divisional and Forcewide level to ensure that a consistent approach exists throughout Sussex and that the use of these powers remains both proportionate and appropriate.

Recorded crime and changing demand

H. How is the Force monitoring change in the levels of recorded offences and the changing demand on the police service during this period?

I. Nationally, reports suggest that increases in speeding offences (on the quieter roads) have been recorded during lockdown. Is this position replicated in Sussex? If so, what does the Force response look like to tackle this area?

J. This crisis is already bringing out the best in people who legitimately want to help but it is also attracting opportunists and callous criminals who want to capitalise on our most vulnerable. Has the Force recorded any COVID-19-related crimes and scams in Sussex?

K. What advice can you offer members of the public at this time to increase their awareness of and to help prevent them from becoming victims of 'coronavirus scammers'?

The Chief Constable confirmed that a range of information and intelligence is collated by the Force on a daily basis that is used to produce a weekly COVID-19 report that provides high-level data across the four areas of: contact; crimes; incidents and criminal justice. This report is used by the Force to inform decisions about the operational response provided and the deployment of police resources.

It was highlighted that there has been a 25% reduction in the total level of crime recorded following the outbreak of COVID-19, in comparison to the same four weeks in 2019. In particular, reductions have been apparent in respect of residential burglaries (-13%), shoplifting (-18%) and serious violence (-23%) as a direct result of individuals being required to stay at home and reductions in non-essential travel.

Conversely, there has been a shift towards other types of criminality during this period, including burglaries of businesses and commercial premises. This is something the Force has responded to by increasing the visible policing presence in these areas and changing patrol paths. Increases have also been recorded in the number of charges for offences of 'possession of controlled substances with intent to supply' because the Force has a greater capacity to respond to reports and intelligence received about these crimes and offenders are more easily identifiable with fewer individuals outside of their homes.

It was emphasised that there has been a small reduction in the reports of domestic abuse received. The Chief Constable reiterated that domestic abuse remains a priority for Sussex Police at any time and reminded individuals about the comprehensive amount of online support that is available to victims and their families.

The advice provided to victims is unchanged: any victims of domestic abuse or children or young people who may have been exposed to it are 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.

The Force is also concerned that some individuals might not be able to contact the Force through these telephone and online channels and is now providing a different 'offline' response through an increased policing presence in supermarkets and on high streets.

In addition, it was highlighted that there has already been a number of reported scams in Sussex relating to the coronavirus including the provision of imitation Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) and testing kits. Sussex Police is using Operation Signature – the Force's established campaign to identify and support vulnerable victims of fraud – to raise public awareness of these scams and to help prevent individuals from becoming victims. In particular, a dedicated page has been created on the Sussex Police website, with specific advice around COVID-19. This can be viewed through the following link: <https://www.sussex.police.uk/advice/advice-and-information/wsi/watch-schemes-initiatives/sus/operation-signature/>

There is evidence to suggest that the volume of traffic on the roads in England and Wales has reduced by more than 60% which has contributed to fewer people committing speeding offences. However, the speeding offences that were recorded between 1 March and 9 April 2020 are at a higher threshold of speeding, with significantly more 100 mph+ offences recorded in 2020 (22%), in comparison to the same period in 2019 (7%). GY confirmed that speed enforcement in Sussex will remain in place throughout the lockdown period, targeting those individuals who choose to exceed speed limits, using a combination of fixed and mobile speed cameras.

ACTION: KB requested a breakdown of the number of speeding offences recorded in Sussex throughout this period by different speed limits.

Personal Protective Equipment

L. At last month's PAM, it was highlighted that Sussex Police had sufficient PPE for all frontline officers and staff to use. Is this still the position?

M. How resilient is the Force currently in terms of absences?

N. Does Sussex Police have any plans to bring retired officers back who have left the service in the past 5 years?

The Chief Constable remained comfortable that the Force has a "sufficient" supply of PPE for frontline officers and staff to use, including a two week reserve of equipment. Sussex Police is continuing to raise awareness amongst officers and staff about the availability of this PPE within the Force and about what equipment is most effective in different situations or environments.

Last week, the Force also secured a contract for the provision of PPE to the workforces of Sussex and Surrey Police. This approach means that a supply line now exists to deliver replacement equipment to both forces that can be distributed throughout, as required.

As referred to at March's PAM, Sussex Police is continuing to monitor sickness and self-isolation figures on a daily basis. The Force currently has an abstraction rate of 7%, with 3.2% of officers sick and a further 3.5% self-isolating and not available for duty. Similar figures are also apparent for police staff (including Police Community Support Officers) with 8% absent from work, through a combination of sickness (3.4%) and self-isolation (4.7%). This compares favourably with the abstraction rates in other police force areas (circa. 10%) and represents an improved position from last month. This is attributed to officers and staff remaining committed to serving the public and a greater number of individuals returning to work following periods of enforced isolation.

GY also explained that police officers and staff (and their immediate families) in isolation now have access to testing if they are displaying any symptoms of COVID-19. This approach seeks to maximise public safety, whilst mitigating against spreading the virus further still. It was emphasised that this testing is currently being prioritised for those officers and staff specifically working on the frontline.

Sussex Police is continuing to review and amend business continuity plans in response to the pandemic to ensure that the Force is able to provide an appropriate response to COVID-19. In particular, the organisation is looking at all available contingencies in case police officer or staff resources should diminish or if it becomes apparent that additional skills and experience are required.

Sussex and Surrey Police have created a database of 750 retired police officers, special constables and police staff – known as Police Emergency Volunteers – who are prepared to return to policing for a temporary period. Members of the public with specific skills have also been encouraged to volunteer too.

It was highlighted that these volunteers (and the additional capacity they will be able to generate) will only be utilised when they are needed most. As stated above, the Force currently has resilience to deliver an effective policing service locally within existing and available numbers. Each of the volunteers in the database is currently written to on a weekly basis to provide them with an update. Further information about the Police Emergency Volunteers can be viewed through the following link:

<https://www.sussex.police.uk/police-forces/sussex-police/areas/careers/jobs/Coronavirus-police-emergency-volunteers/>

Expenditure

O. How is the Force monitoring any additional expenditure incurred as a result of policing activity in response to COVID-19, including the additional policing of public spaces and provision of support to the Sussex Resilience Forum?

The Chief Constable provided KB with assurances that Sussex Police is currently recording all additional costs incurred in relation to Operation Apollo through bespoke budget codes aligned to spending. This includes: police officer and staff pay; overtime; cost of PPE and any other costs associated to the Sussex Resilience Forum.

In addition, the Force has put in place arrangements to monitor the other financial implications on the police service, including: loss of several income streams and the risk of delays to some of the savings programmes planned across 2020/21.

Sussex Police is continuing to keep its financial planning and spending under constant review to mitigate the overall financial impact of COVID-19 on the Force. Each of these areas continues to be monitored and reviewed closely on a weekly basis.

Use of technology

P. Is Sussex Police utilising all available video technology and other platforms to maintain day-to-day policing operations and training?

GY confirmed that Sussex Police is utilising and developing a range of capabilities for video-based technology to support operational policing and the wider organisation.

The workforce is using a range of products, including: Skype; Microsoft Teams; Zoom and WhatsApp to support contact through video briefings and meetings. These forums are also being used to deliver training to new police officers during lockdown.

It was highlighted that Sussex Police has ordered up to 200 new laptops, together with utilising all available computers, to facilitate working from home for those individuals that can do this safely and remotely. The computer systems and technology used by the police service is complex and requires a number of amendments made to software and security settings before they are ready to be distributed throughout the Force for use. The Force has also been utilising 'DeX' platforms to turn existing Mobile Data Terminals – smartphones – into desktop computers that can be connected to screens, keyboards and computer mice to improve their effectiveness and usefulness.

Closing remarks...

The Chief Constable concluded by thanking the Sussex Police workforce for their continued commitment and resourcefulness. Gratitude was also expressed to members of the public who are continuing to follow 'Stay at Home' measures and for showing the police officers and staff the respect that they deserve for carrying out their roles in these times of unprecedented uncertainty. These sentiments were echoed by KB.