

PERFORMANCE & ACCOUNTABILITY MEETING

DATE: 16 April 2021

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

PRESENT: Police & Crime Commissioner – Katy Bourne (KB)
Chief Finance Officer – Iain McCulloch (IMcC)
Chief Constable – Jo Shiner (JS)
Deputy Chief Constable – Julia Chapman (JC)

Digital Content Officer – Sammi Carwardine (webcasting)
Head of Performance – Graham Kane (minutes)

REASSURANCE TO SUSSEX COMMUNITIES – CORONAVIRUS

Earlier this week, another step on the ‘road map’ towards easing the lockdown restrictions safely in England was achieved when non-essential retail and hospitality venues were allowed to re-open on 12 April 2021.

- A. What impact, if any, has this and the re-introduction of the ‘rule of six’ (from 29 March 2021) had on Sussex Police? How is this being managed by the Force?**
- B. How is Sussex Police continuing to use the 5Es – engagement, explanation, education, encouragement and enforcement – to support this transition and protect individuals from the further spread of coronavirus?**
- C. What is the total number of Fixed Penalty Notices (FPNs) issued by Sussex Police to date? Has there been an increase in the number of FPNs issued at the previous stages the lockdown restrictions have been eased? Do you anticipate any increase in the FPNs issued in line with the ‘road map’ moving forward?**
- D. How are you continuing to ensure that powers available to the Force are used consistently and proportionately throughout Sussex?**
- E. What is the total amount of additional costs incurred by Sussex Police to date in response to the pandemic? What proportion of these costs will be reimbursed through Government grants? What further costs are anticipated to be incurred over the next few months? What savings have been realised by the Force?**
- F. What impact has the pandemic had on the ability of the Force to recruit and train police officers and staff? How have you overcome those? Can you clarify the number of officers that Sussex Police will recruit in the current financial year? How many additional officers will there be in post by 31 March 2022?**
- G. Will there be a reduction in the number of officers at Gatwick Airport? If so, where will those officers be posted and how were they previously funded?**

The Chief Constable began by thanking the vast majority of members of the public for their sensible and pragmatic approach, behaviours demonstrated and ongoing support of the lockdown restrictions in place. JS also praised the contribution of frontline police officers and staff for continuing to police the pandemic in a consistent, tolerant and professional manner.

Sussex Police is continuing to work in partnership with Trading Standards and Environmental Health to manage any business and licensing breaches of the restrictions, reviewing the changing regulatory framework on a weekly basis, through the Compliance and Enforcement Group.

It was emphasised that the demand on Operation Apollo – the joint Sussex and Surrey Police response to COVID-19 – and the rest of the Force has remained “relatively constant”, with small increases recorded in the mixing of households, public gatherings (both indoors and outdoors) and quarantine referrals. There were also a number of protests in relation to the Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Bill that took place in Brighton & Hove and other areas of Sussex over the Easter weekend, with more activity anticipated to take place across the summer months.

It was recognised that there has been a steady reduction in the number of FPNs issued in Sussex from the beginning of March into April 2021, as the restrictions have started to be eased and previously prohibited activities are now permitted. Sussex Police has issued a total of 2,682 FPNs between 27 March 2020 and 15 April 2021, including a further 12 FPNs issued since 29 March 2021 for participation in indoor gatherings.

The Force continues to use the 5Es – engagement, explanation, education, encouragement and enforcement – to protect individuals from the further spread of COVID-19, responding positively to any reports of breaches and delivering targeted patrol activity. The potential for increased reporting of non-compliant activity by individuals and breaches at non-essential shops and licensed premises was highlighted. Sussex Police will continue to work in partnership with other agencies to manage this in a fair, proportionate and consistent manner, with the ability to adapt and amend the policing response, as required.

The Chief Constable encouraged individuals to continue to make the appropriate choices and urged against any complacency. The road map for easing the lockdown restrictions safely in England is evidence-led and means that individuals need to wait for the key dates to arrive before they can start to increase their activities. Sussex Police will continue to use dedicated resources with expert working knowledge of each of the different stages of the road map and the revised restrictions in place.

Members of the public were reminded that they can report any breaches of the measures and restrictions to Sussex Police directly, either by telephone to 101, email to 101@sussex.pnn.police.uk or online via the following link: <https://www.sussex.police.uk/tua/tell-us-about/c19/v7/tell-us-about-a-possible-breach-of-coronavirus-covid-19-measures/>

The Chief Constable provided KB with assurances that any enforcement activity undertaken by the Force in this area continues to be monitored, scrutinised and authorised through the dedicated Operation Apollo command structure. This includes the review of Body Worn Video footage and the manner of the interactions/enforcement activity carried out to ensure that the powers available to the Force are being used appropriately and responsibly. This position is kept under constant review.

The Daily Management Meetings (DMMs) within Operation Apollo, attended by District Commanders, ensures that a consistent approach exists throughout each of the policing districts within Sussex. This approach has been complemented by the provision of Forcewide guidance, summarising the changes to the restrictions at each of the different stages of the road map, following direction from the National Police Chiefs’ Council. National data is also considered by the Force to ascertain whether Sussex Police is an outlier in comparison to other police force areas and Most Similar Group of forces to Sussex, in terms of the policing approach, response and FPNs issued locally.

JS confirmed that Sussex Police has incurred approximately £3.4 million in additional costs in response to the pandemic. Further reductions in the income generated by the Force are estimated to be approximately £3.0 million too, including reduced policing services at Gatwick Airport, smaller numbers of speeding fines issued, postponement of public and training events and reductions in foreign nationals.

This position needs to be balanced against the additional Surge Grant funding made available to police force areas to provide extra policing patrols and visible enforcement of the restrictions throughout the areas with the greatest levels of non-compliance. Sussex Police has also realised savings of approximately £1.0 million during this period in respect of reduced fuel costs, travel expenses and utility bills.

It was highlighted that Sussex Police will receive Government grants worth £3.7 million to reimburse them for some of these additional costs. However, this will still generate an additional savings requirement for the Force next year. These additional costs, together with the investment, inflation and reductions in income have generated further budgetary pressures and a total savings requirement for Sussex Police of £8million for 2021/22.

IMcC welcomed the sustained support that has been afforded to police force areas by the Government and confirmed that a further £1.5 million has been set aside to Sussex Police reserves to manage any further costs that are incurred in this respect during 2021/22.

It was emphasised that the Force is continuing to regularly monitor its financial planning by spending money efficiently and effectively. Sussex Police is anticipating a complex picture for the summer, autumn and winter months and is currently in the process of finalising its plans and resources, although much of this is dependent on the continued easing of the restrictions, as set out in the road map.

The Chief Constable confirmed that Sussex Police was "on track" to recruit and train the new police officers, staff, Police Community Support Officers (PCSOs) and Special Constables planned during 2021/22, despite the increased challenges presented to the Force by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Last year, the Force amended its processes and procedures to maximise all available opportunities to expand the police workforce during the year, including movement to online interviews, assessment centres and virtual learning to ensure compliance with the social distancing measures in place. Where this was not possible and face-to-face interactions were still required, such as police officer safety training, the Force used 'bubbles' to reduce the number of individuals from different households mixing at any one time. As a result, it was recognised that the pandemic had "little impact" on this recruitment and training.

*In 2021/22, Sussex Police will recruit 249 new police officers to deliver the planned increases in policing resources, offset against a reduction of 34 externally funded posts at Gatwick Airport Limited and replacing those officers set to leave the organisation during the year. This will comprise 30 officers recruited following an increase to the police precept and 121 officers recruited as part of Operation Uplift. **KB was reassured to note that this recruitment will equate to an additional net increase of 117 police officers in Sussex by March 2022.***

CALL HANDLING TIMES AND CONTACT

I remain pleased with the continued and sustained performance demonstrated for call handling times and contact to Sussex Police.

A. Can you provide me with an update regarding Force performance in respect of emergency calls (999), non-emergency calls (101) and non-voice demand (emails, webforms and online reports)?

B. What impact, if any, is the COVID-19 pandemic continuing to have on the Force Communication, Command and Control Department (FCCCD)? And, how is this being monitored and managed to ensure that individuals can contact the police, as and when required?

JC began by recognising the significant work that has been undertaken within the FCCCD to improve the way that Sussex Police is able to respond to and service the needs of members of the public. This has been achieved through combined improvements to its accessibility through reduced waiting times and increased functionality of non-voice demand through the Single Online Home (SOH) – a common platform that allows members of the public to report, transact and contact the police online.

The Deputy Chief Constable confirmed that there had been an increase in the number of 999 calls received by the Force in recent months, in line with the easing of the COVID-19 restrictions. These increased from 14,159 calls received to the emergency number in February 2021, to 17,353 calls received in March. This equated to an additional 3,194 calls (+22%) to the 999 number, with 97% of these calls answered within 10 seconds. This level of performance has now been demonstrated by the Force in each of the past 18 months.

There was also an increase in the number of 101 calls received across the same period, with Sussex Police taking an average of 2 minutes and 17 seconds to answer the 21,863 calls offered to the 101 non-emergency number in February, in comparison to the average of 3 minutes and 5 seconds taken to answer the 26,255 calls received in March 2021. The number of abandoned calls also remained consistent across both months with 6.1% and 7.5% recorded across each of the months, respectively.

The progress demonstrated by the Force in this area is even more encouraging when compared to the average wait time of 14 minutes and 16 seconds per call and an abandonment rate of 43.1% demonstrated across 2018/19, prior to the commencement of the Contact Transformation Programme. These improvements are attributed to additional workforce numbers, facilitated by increases to the police precept in recent years, and enhancements to processes and procedures used within the FCCCD – including the implementation of technical solutions, such as QueueBuster (to provide a call back service) and the reduction of secondary calls generated.

A further increase was also apparent in respect of the non-voice demand received by the Force through emails, webforms and online reports received through the SOH. Sussex Police received a combined total of 18,769 non-voice contacts across the month of February, in comparison to the 22,756 (non-voice) contacts received in March 2021. This equated to an additional 3,987 emails, webforms and online reports (+21%) and reflects the continued and sustained shift in police contact since the SOH platform was launched in Sussex in December 2018.

This platform shift has also generated additional demand for the Force that requires triaging within the FCCCD. KB was reassured to note that Sussex Police take an average of 96 minutes to triage all non-voice demand received through the various platform to identify any high-risk reports or those that require a priority response. It was emphasised that performance in this area has been consistent since September 2020.

The Deputy Chief Constable confirmed that Sussex Police had already invested heavily in business continuity to support the FCCCD prior to the commencement of the pandemic and the introduction of the national restrictions. This included proactively disseminating the resources from Sussex Police Headquarters in Lewes across four different physical locations throughout the county.

This approach was enacted to reduce the number of individuals required to work together at each venue and to facilitate better social distancing measures – thereby increasing the resilience of the FCCCD by safeguarding further the individual workforce and ensuring that the level of service for members of the public was maintained. It was highlighted that within these revised locations, Sussex Police has invested in additional protective screens between individual workstations, the provision of Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) and the greater availability of hand sanitiser dispensers throughout.

JC concluded by stating that some of the non-voice demand received through the SOH, including reports of COVID restriction breaches, has also provided individuals required to shield and/or self-isolate throughout the pandemic with the opportunity to work from home to support the wider work of the FCCCD. This has not been an option previously and the Force has sought to maximise opportunities for individuals to work remotely and agilely where it has been in the interests of the business and the workforce.

OUTSTANDING WARRANTS

The Warrant Enforcement Bureau undertakes regular checks of all outstanding warrants in Sussex to find and locate these individuals.

A. How many arrest warrants were issued in Sussex during 2020/21? What was the execution rate for these warrants? And, how does this compare to the performance recorded in this area across previous years?

B. How many arrest warrants remain outstanding in Sussex? And, what different categories do these warrants relate to?

C. What is Sussex Police doing to find these individuals? How are they prioritised? And, what impact has the pandemic had on the ability of the Force to execute these outstanding warrants?

D. Have the changes to pre-charge bail had an impact on the number of outstanding warrants in Sussex? If so, how is this being managed by the Force?

E. How are the breaches of any other orders, including Stalking Protection Orders (SPOs) and Domestic Violence Protection Orders (DVPOs), managed by Sussex Police? And, how are these processes reviewed and amended to ensure that they remain fit-for-purpose?

JC explained that warrants are issued by Sussex Police for a number of different reasons, including failing to appear (FTA) at court (for criminal and civil matters), first instance (warrants of apprehension – where the police have not yet arrested an individual for the offence stated), breaches of bail conditions or court orders and/or non-payment of fines.

The Deputy Chief Constable confirmed that 1,616 arrest warrants were issued by Sussex Police throughout the calendar year of 2020, of which 160 remained outstanding as at 31 December 2020. This equated to an execution rate of 90% and, despite a reduction in the number of arrest warrants issued and execution rates demonstrated in 2018 (1,967 issued, 97% executed) and 2019 (1,874 issued, 96% executed), continues to remain a focus for the Force.

It was highlighted that 467 warrants were issued between the period 1 January to 31 March 2021, of which 115 remain outstanding. This equates to a lower execution rate of 75% and is consistent with the performance demonstrated across the same periods in previous years. The Force is confident that this rate will improve across the remainder of the calendar year.

The reduction in the number of warrants issued and executed locally was attributed to the enforced closures of the Magistrates' and Crown Courts between April and May 2020 to prevent the further spread of COVID-19. These closures made it difficult for the Force to present these individuals back to the court, in particular. There was also a reduced capacity when the courts were first reopened with only a small amount of hearings available for those individuals being held on remand in police custody.

It was explained that the Warrant Enforcement Bureau enter all warrants received onto a system and make an initial assessment against threat, harm and risk based on the seriousness of the offence, vulnerability of the victim and characteristics of the offender, with review dates set according to the category, as follows:

Category A: *For the most serious offences including murder, rape, serious assaults, robbery and drug trafficking (these warrants are subject to a review every two weeks).*

Category B: *For the less serious offences including volume crime, theft, possession of drugs and criminal damage (these warrants are subject to a review every three weeks).*

Category C: *For minor public order offences including drunk and disorderly and low-level traffic offences (these warrants are subject to a review every four weeks).*

Once categorised, the warrants are tasked out to the most appropriate team for response. All outstanding or 'live' warrants in the system are reviewed daily and prioritised accordingly to ensure that the individuals wanted are found and located. This process will include conducting checks on all available police systems, utilising data from other partner agencies and making requests for assistance from members of the public, through Crimestoppers and social media, where appropriate. It was also highlighted that the Tactical Enforcement Units (TEUs) and Specialist Enforcement Unit (SEU) will be used to target the more prolific and/or serious offenders in terms of warrant execution.

The Deputy Chief Constable confirmed that the total number of 'live' warrants that remain outstanding in Sussex is 160. This comprises 135 FTA warrants (of which 13 were Category A, 115 were Category B and 7 were Category C), 9 first instance warrants (where the offender has FTA, has not yet been arrested or is thought to be abroad), 10 breaches of bail conditions and/or post sentence court orders, and six 'other agency' warrants (including offences relating to Government departments and local authorities).

It was highlighted that Sussex Police continue to provide a proactive and proportionate policing response to maximise the execution rate for all warrants that remain live on the system, although the associated costs of locating and executing warrants (both in terms of police officer time and resources) was acknowledged. It was also recognised that it will never be possible to clear all of the outstanding warrants. This is because some individuals cannot be located or will have moved abroad to countries where bilateral extradition treaties do not exist between the United Kingdom and the country concerned, or where the offence is not deemed serious enough to meet the criteria for extradition. There will also be instances where administrative processes are required to remove an individual from the system, following further liaison with the Crown Prosecution Service (CPS).

The COVID-19 pandemic has had a significant impact on the number of warrants issued by the courts in the past year. During the months of April, May and June 2020, only 114 warrants were issued, in comparison to 510 warrants issued over the same three-month period in 2019. The improved execution rate of 68% during this period in 2020, compared to 62% in 2019, were attributed to proactive policing in this area and the national requirement for individuals to stay at home.

Sussex Police is currently in the process of implementing a new procedure for warrants, bringing together teams from the Warrant Enforcement Bureau and Criminal Justice Department to streamline the processes and to target better the less serious offences, whilst maintaining the effective performance demonstrated for 'Category A' warrants issued. These revised practices are anticipated to be fully functional by July 2021.

The Deputy Chief Constable recognised that the changes to pre-charge bail are having an impact on arrest warrants in Sussex now that there is no formal duty to report back to a police station or court for those individuals released under investigation (RUI). In particular, the number of postal requisitions issued for summons to court has increased by more than 200% in Sussex, following the introduction of RUI, with fewer individuals returning on bail to be charged. The significance of any link to the changes introduced by the Policing and Crime Act in April 2017 is proving difficult to quantify numerically and further work is required to understand this position better.

JC confirmed that all breaches of SPOs and DVPOs are taken really seriously by Sussex Police, with robust measures in place to ensure that victims of crime are safeguarded effectively. The Force currently has 30 SPOs in place, with a further four awaiting listing at court. There were 20 breaches of the SPOs recorded in 2020, with a further four breaches in 2021 to date. The SPO breaches are managed by the Violent and Sex Offender Register (ViSOR) team who make regular visits to and engage with those individuals concerned to ensure that they are abiding by the conditions imposed.

Sussex Police has also issued 46 DVPOs during 2021 to date, for which there have been 17 breaches. There is a minimum of three enforcement checks made for each breach, with the first visit conducted within 48 hours, linking in with the Independent Domestic Violence Advisors (IDVAs) to assist with any safeguarding, as required. Additional checks are also made available dependent on the level of risk identified and the individual circumstances of each case.

Where any breaches in the orders are identified, the perpetrators are tracked and managed through DMMs on each of the three policing divisions until they are located and arrested. KB was reassured to note that 70% of all offenders were located and arrested within 48 hours of a breach.

OPERATION HYDRANT – NON-RECENT CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE

Operation Hydrant is the national policing response, oversight and coordination of non-recent child sexual abuse investigations relating to persons of public prominence or offences that took place within institutional settings.

A. Last month (29 March), Chief Constable Simon Bailey, National Police Chiefs' Council lead for Operation Hydrant, expressed concern that some schools had failed to challenge a "culture of misogyny and sexual harassment" and "may have covered up" sexual offences to protect their reputations. What is the Force doing to encourage and support individuals to report ALL offences of sexual abuse?

B. How does Operation Hydrant support the Sussex Police response in this area? And, how is the Force kept informed about investigations by other police force areas in England and Wales to prevent duplication of effort?

C. The most recent figures published for Operation Hydrant confirmed that 2,209 alleged suspects remain subject to live investigations, as at 31 December 2020. What does Force performance look like in this area?

D. What impact is the significant backlog in the courts and criminal justice system, generated by the pandemic, having on the ability of Sussex Police to provide support and assistance for victims and witnesses? And, how is this being monitored and managed by the Force?

JC began by recognising the significant impact that any form of sexual abuse can have on victims and survivors of these types of offences. It was highlighted that the Department for Education, working alongside Operation Hydrant and the National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children (NSPCC), launched a helpline on 1 April 2021 for matters of this nature to be reported.

This helpline is available for all victims of sexual abuse in schools, past or present, with all reports submitted through this platform reviewed and investigated. Where there are immediate safeguarding concerns raised, these calls will be diverted by the NSPCC to the local police force area for action, as appropriate. The Deputy Chief Constable encouraged any individuals who have been a victim of past or present sexual abuse to use this helpline or to report these offences directly to Sussex Police. Further information about the 'Abuse in Education Helpline' can be viewed through the following link:

<https://dfemedia.blog.gov.uk/2021/04/01/everything-you-need-to-know-about-the-governments-newly-launched-abuse-in-education-helpline/>

It was emphasised that Sussex Police has a strong online presence in this area and has received 88 reports through this platform in respect of violence against women and girls since the beginning of March 2021. The Force is also linked into the Pan Sussex Sexual Violence and Abuse Partnership to understand the most effective way to communicate with victims and survivors of sexual violence, including the reporting of positive court results in the media to provide other victims with the confidence to report these offences. Further information about the help, support and advice that is available to victims of rape, sexual assault and sexual abuse, including access to Sexual Assault Referral Centres, IDVAs and third-party reporting, is available through the following link:

<https://www.sussex.police.uk/advice/advice-and-information/rsa/rape-and-sexual-assault/>

It was highlighted that Sussex Police has identified an increase in non-recent reports of sexual abuse recorded locally. This increased from 182 offences reported across the three months of October, November and December 2020, to 276 offences reported across the three months of January, February and March 2021 – an increase of 94 offences (+52%). This change in reporting was attributed to increased trust and confidence of victims and the ability of the police service to better safeguard and support individuals through the criminal justice process. These increases in recorded offences are also considered to be in line with the national averages throughout England and Wales.

The national coordination and oversight by Operation Hydrant ensures that any mass reporting can be managed effectively, and that an understanding of both the scale of reports and an analysis of them can be easily undertaken. It also allows for the deconfliction of intelligence to take place and reduces the potential for duplication – with victims potentially reporting multiple offenders across different geographical areas. Any referrals to local police forces are made through the Operation Hydrant network which has operated effectively since its establishment in June 2014.

Operation Hydrant is informed by individual police force areas of any local investigations meeting the criteria, including non-recent offences (more than a year old) involving an institution, organisation or a person of public prominence. The majority of referrals from Operation Hydrant come from the Truth Project – part of the Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse. It was highlighted that some of these reports are decades old and, in some instances, the suspect is already deceased. In other cases, the victim will not provide their details to the police and means that, although the information is recorded, a criminal investigation is not possible. Further information about the Truth Project can be viewed through the following link:

<https://www.truthproject.org.uk/i-will-be-heard>

It was highlighted that, as at 31 March 2021, the number of alleged suspects notified to Operation Hydrant since its inception was 8,169. A total of 2,087 of these individuals remain subject to live investigations within Operation Hydrant (26%), with 41 of these suspects living in Sussex (2%). The Force has now carried out 211 separate investigations into these Operation Hydrant suspects that have now been closed – these related to 301 individual victims. Of those investigations completed in Sussex, 39 individuals were convicted of an offence, relating to 90 individual victims.

The Deputy Chief Constable confirmed that the pandemic has generated a significant backlog for the courts and criminal justice system. In particular, the impact recognised by the Witness Care Unit in Sussex has been substantial in terms of managing the backlog of outstanding cases and balancing any new cases that are reported to the unit, whilst simultaneously trying to ensure that victims and witnesses remain engaged and supportive of the prosecutions. This has resulted in Witness Care Officers (WCOs) carrying higher caseloads than ever, working longer hours to manage this effectively. It has also been noted that the mental health of victims and witnesses has been negatively impacted upon during the pandemic and means that additional support is required too.

It is recognised that the Crown Court listings are particularly challenging, with the staff at the courts doing everything within their powers to ensure that court users remain safe, whilst managing those attending and the increased footfall in court premises. However, the limited number of court rooms that are suitable to host trials at present means that it is constant challenge to list multiple priority cases at the same time. It is the role of the WCOs – who understand these complexities – to try and communicate this position and any associated messages to the victims and witnesses to retain their support within the process.

In addition, KB was informed that a Gold Group has been established between the Force and criminal justice partners to look at the backlog of cases in Sussex. Following discussions at this forum, a Nightingale Court – a temporary court established to respond to the backlog of cases brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic – was opened in Chichester last week (6 April 2021) on a trial basis. If successful, there are plans to open a second court room within the Nightingale Court to assist further with the backlog of cases in the coming weeks.

The further establishment of a multi-agency working group between the Office of the Sussex Police & Crime Commissioner; Sussex Police, Surrey Police and Kent Police; CPS; Her Majesty's Courts and Tribunals Service and the Witness Service are looking at the use of a Cloud Video Platform to enable for victims and witnesses to provide evidence remotely, away from a court building. This is being considered on a case-by-case basis.

DOG THEFTS IN SUSSEX – REVISTED

At February's PAM, I announced the launch of a national dog theft survey, in partnership with the Association of Police & Crime Commissioners (APCC). The survey received 124,729 responses and highlighted the strength of feeling about this subject and confirmation that public perception and fear of this crime has increased, particularly since lockdown started last year.

- A. How many reports of dog theft have been recorded by the Force in 2021? And, are you confident that the risk of this criminality remains low in Sussex?**
- B. How has the introduction of the Rural Crime Team and Operation Collar improved the Sussex Police response to dog thefts? And, what do the plans look like to strengthen the Force response further in this area?**
- C. Has Sussex Police had any recent operational successes where arrests have been made and stolen dogs returned to their owners? If so, how have you reflected on these? And, what lessons have been learnt?**
- D. What can individual dog (and other pet) owners do to prevent their animals from being stolen or getting lost?**

JS began by again recognising the prominent role that dogs and other pets have within homes and family settings and, as such, acknowledged the emotions and concerns that exist in respect of this subject for many. The importance of accurately managing the facts, public perceptions and increased focus on dog thefts that has been particularly apparent during the last year of lockdown was highlighted too.

Dog thefts continue to remain low in Sussex. The Force has recorded 13 thefts of a dog in 2021 to date, including five reports that related to disputes over dog ownership between known parties, rather than dog theft. The remaining 8 cases included: three instances where it was believed that the dogs were lost, rather than stolen; and one instance that related to a dispute over money. There have only been four cases this year where there is evidence that the dogs had been taken by a third-party, unknown to the victim. Each of these thefts remains subject to ongoing investigations by Sussex Police.

As described previously, the Force has recently made improvements to its recording practices in this area to better identify instances of dog thefts. This has been achieved through the creation of Operation Collar – a specific tag allocated to all reports of dog theft. As such, any new reports received by Sussex Police through the FCCCD are now tagged so that they can be easily tracked, monitored and managed.

The Chief Constable confirmed that the Rural Crime Team (RCT) is leading on the response to dog thefts in Sussex. Tackling this area is a key priority for the team and all reports allocated an Operation Collar tag are passed to two dedicated police officers within the RCT to scan, analyse and review the intelligence received. Any information of interest is disseminated to the 7 police constables and six PCSOs within the team to investigate, as appropriate. This includes proactive policing patrols at recognised hot-spots and targeting suspicious vehicles and/or persons identified through the information and intelligence received by the Force.

Sussex Police also receives intelligence from Operation Opal – a national intelligence unit focused on serious organised acquisitive crime where there is a series of offences impacting on two or more police force areas. This work helps to link investigations, where common methods or suspects are identified and the sharing of any best practice.

*The RCT is proactively working with partner agencies, including the **Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (RSPCA)**, Trading Standards, **DogLost** and the **National Farmers' Union**, to gather intelligence and cross-reference information about dog theft, found dogs and puppy farming. The RCT team is also seeking to educate and provide crime prevention advice to the dog owning community to enable them to better to protect themselves and their pets.*

It was also emphasised that there is a planned uplift of four additional police constables within the RCT during 2021/22. This will increase the number of dedicated resources available within the team and will strengthen further the Force response in this area. Further information about Operation Collar and the Sussex Police response to dog thefts can be viewed through the following link:

<https://www.sussex.police.uk/police-forces/sussex-police/areas/campaigns/campaigns/op-collar/>

The Chief Constable confirmed that following a complex investigation by the Criminal Investigation Department within Crawley district, police officers seized 10 dogs during the execution of search warrant at a site in Surrey last month (16 March 2021). It was highlighted that one dog – reported missing 10 months before to another police force – was identified and reunited with its owners. An investigation is currently underway to identify the remaining dogs and their lawful owners, working closely with the RCT and other police force areas. Further information can be viewed through the following link:

**[https://www.sussex.police.uk/news/sussex/news/witness-appeals/police-
seek-owners-of-suspected-stolen-
dogs/#:~:text=Officers%20seized%2010%20dogs%20during,dogs%20and%
20their%20lawful%20owners.](https://www.sussex.police.uk/news/sussex/news/witness-appeals/police-seek-owners-of-suspected-stolen-dogs/#:~:text=Officers%20seized%2010%20dogs%20during,dogs%20and%20their%20lawful%20owners.)**

It was recognised that the demand for dog ownership has increased “exponentially” during the pandemic, with evidence to suggest that the thefts of dogs and puppy farming linked to Organised Crime Groups (OCGs) is an emerging threat and challenge for some police force areas within England and Wales. There is also some evidence to suggest that stolen dogs are being used for fighting and/or as bait animals. However, the prevalence of OCGs targeting dogs in Sussex was not recognised to be an issue for the Force at present. Sussex Police and the RCT are continuing to monitor this position closely, through Operation Opal.

The Chief Constable concluded by reminding all dog (and other pet) owners that they can assist the Force by taking some personal responsibility for protecting their animals from being stolen or getting lost. This includes:

- ✓ *Ensuring that dogs are microchipped and registered with up to date information.*
- ✓ *Investing in a collar and name tag, including your surname and telephone number, rather than simply the name of your pet.*
- ✓ *Ensuring that gardens, yards and gates are locked and secured so that no one can gain entry to take your dog and that your dog cannot escape.*
- ✓ *Not leaving your dog unattended in the garden, car or outside shops, wherever possible.*

*Members of the public were encouraged to report all thefts of dogs (or other pets and animals) and any suspicious behaviour or activity to Sussex Police directly, either by telephone to 101, email to **101@sussex.pnn.police.uk** or online via the following link: **<https://www.sussex.police.uk/reportcrime>***

*Individuals will also need to notify their microchip database providers immediately and advise their local dog warden should a dog be reported lost or stolen. If you have any information about dog thefts, puppy farming or baiting and do not feel comfortable reporting this to the police, this can be reported anonymously to **Crimestoppers** by telephone to 0800 555 111.*

PLANNING FOR THE POLICING OF LOCAL ELECTIONS IN SUSSEX

The Cabinet Office has confirmed that local, mayoral and Police & Crime Commissioner (PCC) elections in England will go ahead as planned next month.

A. How is Sussex Police planning for the local elections taking place in Sussex?

JS confirmed that significant plans and processes are in place to support the [circa] 70 local elections taking place in Sussex on Thursday, 6 May 2021, including the PCC election.

It was highlighted that Operation Vote – a joint policing response between Sussex Police and Surrey Police – has been established to ensure that a consistent approach is adopted across both police force areas. This will include the implementation of a full public safety command structure and the development of tactical plans.

Sussex Police will support the Police Area Returning Officers and Local Returning Officers throughout the county to safely deliver and protect the integrity of these elections.

NEXT UP:

The next PAM is on Friday, 21 May 2021 at 13:00. Further information can be viewed on my website through the following link:

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