

PERFORMANCE & ACCOUNTABILITY MEETING

DATE: 16 December 2022

LOCATION: Sackville House, Lewes

PRESENT: Police & Crime Commissioner – Katy Bourne [KB]
Chief Executive Officer – Mark Streater [MS]
Chief Constable – Jo Shiner [JS]

Correspondence and Admin Officer – Elliot Saunders [webcasting]
Head of Performance – Graham Kane [minutes]

PROVISIONAL POLICE GRANT SETTLEMENT 2023/24

The provisional police grant settlement for 2023/24 was announced this week.

A. What was your overall reaction to this announcement?

B. What impact is this settlement anticipated to have on both the Medium-Term Financial Strategy and the savings requirement for the Force next year?

The Chief Constable welcomed the provisional police grant settlement announced by the Home Secretary on Wednesday, 14 December 2022. JS explained that Sussex Police are currently considering the initial settlement to understand better how it will impact both the Medium-Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) and any investment and savings requirements for the Force next year.

It was emphasised that the [provisional] total grant funding for Sussex Police in 2023/24 will be £207.1million which represents approximately £800,000 more than was originally anticipated. This settlement will enable Sussex Police to strengthen further its frontline policing by maintaining the force level allocations of the 20,000 additional officers recruited over the past three years [through the national Police Uplift Programme], alongside the continued delivery of the areas invested in previously to protect communities, catch criminals and deliver an outstanding service to victims, witnesses and members of the public in Sussex. This level of grant funding will also enable the Force to respond to the significant budget pressures that continue to face the police service, including the potential for any future pay awards [above 2%] and the ongoing increases to costs and consumer price inflation.

KB confirmed that this settlement is predicated on all Police & Crime Commissioners in England and Wales increasing the annual council tax bill for Band D properties in their areas by £15 [the maximum amount permitted].

The Chief Constable explained that all known financial pressures have been included within the MTFS, with these planning assumptions based on the best estimates available in respect of the ongoing [and variable] inflationary pressures. The Force will also require the planned use of reserves alongside the increased use of vacancy management to deliver a balanced budget for 2023/24.

KB explained that she has not yet made any decision about the police precept for 2023/24 and has launched a public consultation to find out whether local taxpayers would be prepared to pay more to support policing in Sussex. The consultation will remain open until Tuesday, 10 January 2023 and, once closed, KB is duty-bound to inform the Sussex Police & Crime Panel of her considerations with this decision set to be reviewed at the meeting on Friday, 27 January 2023. Further information about the consultation, including a link to questions, can be viewed through the following link:
<https://www.sussex-pcc.gov.uk/about/news/have-your-say-on-police-funding-precept-survey-202324/>

OPERATION LIMIT – CHRISTMAS DRINK-AND-DRUG-DRIVE CAMPAIGN 2022

Sussex Police are currently taking part in Operation Limit – a national policing response to target and detect incidents of drink-and-drug-driving during the football World Cup and in the lead up to Christmas and New Year celebrations across England and Wales.

A. What are the aims and objectives of Operation Limit?

B. How has Operation Limit progressed to date? How many drivers have been breathalysed and/or tested for substances and subsequently arrested for drink-or-drug-driving offences as part of the campaign? And how does this compare to previous years?

C. How can any specific concerns about individuals suspected of drink-or-drug-driving be reported to Sussex Police?

D. What are some of the consequences that individuals could face for driving under the influence of drink or drugs?

E. Drink-and-drug-driving is regarded as one of the 'fatal five' by the Sussex Safer Roads Partnership. How is the Partnership supporting these campaigns?

The Chief Constable explained that Operation Limit has made a positive start following its launch earlier this month [5 December 2022]. The aims of the campaign are to minimise the risk to the public by targeting those individuals who drink-and-drug-drive, reduce the number of individuals killed or seriously injured on the roads and to disrupt organised criminal activity using the road network by maximising the effectiveness of a heightened policing response.

[As in previous years] Sussex Police has used a combination of high-visibility operational policing [through liveried police cars and motorcycles] to undertake engagement, vehicle stops, checks, testing [where the 'reasonable grounds' for suspicion are met], together with a more targeted approach [using unmarked cars and motorcycles] to target specific locations based on the intelligence received from members of the public.

It was highlighted that more than 935 vehicles had been stopped by Sussex Police officers as part of Operation Dragonfly to date [16 December 2022]. Of those individuals stopped, 114 individuals were arrested and charged with drink-or-drug-driving offences – either for providing positive samples or refusing to offer samples. The greater propensity for drug-driving offences to be detected at the roadside [compared to drink-driving offences] was attributed to Sussex Police becoming better at detecting offences through more widespread and effective use of drug-wipe technology. The number of arrests made across the first 11 days of the campaign was also recognised to be proportionately higher than in previous years, although these numbers may change with the campaign scheduled to run across the remainder of the month until 1 January 2023.

*Operation Limit is also being run alongside a national campaign – 'Drink Driving: Together We Can Stop It' – which urges members of the public to help prevent, persuade and, as a last resort, report drink-and-drug drivers to the police. Members of the public with any specific information and/or actionable intelligence about individuals they suspect of drink-or-drug-driving were encouraged to report these to the police directly. This can be done by telephone to 101, text to 65999 or via the Sussex Police website [www.sussex.police.uk]. Individuals can also contact the independent charity Crimestoppers anonymously on 0800 555 111. **If it is known that someone is drink-or-drug-driving, bystanders should call 999 immediately.***

It was also highlighted that Operation Crackdown was formally relaunched earlier this month and now has an enhanced capability to report individuals known to be drink-or-drug-driving. This revision has already contributed to an increased number of reports being made through the site and the subsequent positive action taken by the police. Further information can be viewed on the Operation Crackdown website through the following link: www.operationcrackdown.co.uk

The Chief Constable highlighted that all drivers should be aware of the consequences of drink-and-drug-driving and, most importantly, the risk of killing or seriously injuring themselves and/or someone else. It was explained that those individuals convicted of this criminal offence could face a minimum 12-month driving ban, points on their driving license, an unlimited fine and, where appropriate, a maximum prison sentence of 14 years [for causing death by careless driving when under the influence of drink-or-drugs]. There would also be the personal impact of having a criminal record, the potential loss of employment and increased difficulties getting into some countries [i.e., United States of America].

[Anecdotally] The Institute of Advanced Motoring (IAM) RoadSmart has calculated the cost of a drink-drive conviction to be up to £70,000 in terms of fines, court costs, solicitors' fees, increased insurance costs and the potential for lost income and remuneration. JS confirmed that the National Police Chiefs' Council are continuing to levy the Government to increase the punitive outcomes issued for drink-and-drug driving offences in England and Wales.

The Sussex Safer Roads Partnership (SSRP) is supporting these campaigns by raising the awareness of the risks of driving under the influence of drink-and-drugs through the delivery of shared road safety messages, social media announcements and press releases. The three upper-tier local authorities [Brighton & Hove City Council, East Sussex County Council and West Sussex County Council], together with East Sussex Fire & Rescue Service, West Sussex Fire & Rescue Service, South East Coast Ambulance Service and Community Speed Watch groups throughout Sussex are each supporting the SSRP in the delivery of this work by promoting and publicising these preventative campaigns further still through collaborative attendance and activity at public events.

KB concluded by stating that the results of Operation Limit would be discussed further at the Performance & Accountability Meeting (PAM) on 20 January 2023 following the conclusion of the campaign and the finalisation of the data captured.

OPERATION HOPE – DOMESTIC ABUSE

Sussex Police are safeguarding victims of domestic abuse and targeting known domestic abuse perpetrators during the football World Cup and over the Christmas and New Year period as part of Operation Hope.

A. How will Sussex Police provide victims of domestic abuse with an enhanced policing response as part of Operation Hope?

B. What involvement do Independent Domestic Violence Advisors have in this process? And how are these individuals used to safeguard and support the most vulnerable victims in Sussex?

C. How will Operation Hope be used to proactively engage, work with and manage high-harm and repeat perpetrators of domestic abuse to prevent further offending? And how will the Domestic Violence Disclosure Scheme be used to support the Force response in terms of disclosures and referrals to support services and/or perpetrator programmes?

D. White Ribbon Day marked the start of campaign to prevent violence against women and girls. How have you reflected on the campaign and the 16 days of activism against gender-based violence?

E. Sussex Police are one of the 14 Operation Soteria Bluestone 'pathfinder' forces. For the benefit of the viewers, can you explain what this means? And what difference is this transformational approach anticipated to make for victims of these sexual offences?

The Chief Constable confirmed that whilst domestic abuse remains an ongoing focus and priority for Sussex Police throughout the calendar year, all available data suggests that instances of domestic abuse increase around the festive season and during football tournaments. This is attributed to individuals spending more time at home in greater numbers, increased consumption of alcohol and heightened tensions and pressures that can exist and be created during the festivities.

Phase One of Operation Hope took place over three days in November [15, 16 and 17] and consisted of a period of intensification activity with 49 arrests made for domestic abuse offences. This comprised a combination of arrests relating to immediate calls for service and outstanding arrests linked to existing reports where no arrest had been made previously. This targeted action against new and known perpetrators of domestic abuse delivered a clear message that this type of behaviour would not be tolerated and reaffirmed an ongoing message of support to victims that the police are always there to help protect and safeguard survivors, including all marginalised groups. This approach was supported by proactive and collaborative communication by partners and promotion through social media channels, including publishing video footage of the arrests to support White Ribbon Day [25 November 2022].

Phase Two of Operation Hope identified 200 high-risk victims of domestic abuse across Sussex to receive proactive joint agency visits from the police and partner agencies – including the deployment of three Independent Domestic Violence Advisors (IDVAs) – across separate days during the World Cup and in the days immediately leading up to the festive period. The IDVAs are deployed following discussions at the pan-Sussex Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Conference (MARAC) to consider where these individuals would have the greatest impact.

The visits seek to build relationships with victims of domestic abuse, discuss safeguarding arrangements, provide safety equipment and raise awareness of the range of support services available. The IDVAs also use these visits to identify any new partners and the potential requirement for emergency disclosures via the Domestic Violence Disclosure Scheme (DVDS). The Force has successfully completed 42 of the 70 visits attempted to date [60%] with the remainder of these visits planned before Christmas.

This approach is recognised to improve the overall victim experience and has been shown to generate greater trust and confidence in the police service. This is recognised to contribute towards increased reporting of domestic abuse offences and enhanced support for prosecutions throughout the criminal justice process. The MARAC will measure the effectiveness of these deployments at the conclusion of Operation Hope.

IDVAs from the Complex Domestic Abuse and Stalking Perpetrator Unit (CDASU) will also visit high-harm and repeat perpetrators at risk of offending during Phase Two of Operation Hope to engage with known offenders and encourage participation in perpetrator and healthy relationships programmes.

JS provided KB with assurances that the Force is currently using the DVDS – better known as Clare’s Law – to good effect in Sussex. It was highlighted that Sussex Police has received 912 applications for information under the scheme between January and November 2022. Each of the applications received is triaged on its own merits, with the Force having made an average of 36 disclosures per month [and taken circa. 32 days to investigate, gather and disclose the information to support these requests]. The number of applications received through the scheme is recognised to have more than doubled over the past three years which has generated additional work for the Force. This has comprised year-on-year increases in applications from 2019 [444 applications], 2020 [549 applications] and 2021 [701 applications] and was recognised to demonstrate good awareness and confidence in the use of the system.

The Chief Constable explained that Sussex Police was one of the first police force areas in England and Wales to be awarded White Ribbon Status in 2013. The Force remains committed in its support of the campaign and was actively engaged in a variety of events held by partners across Sussex during the 16 days of activism. This was supported by the delivery of proactive messaging and communications through local press and social media channels in support of the initiative. This year, White Ribbon Day took place during the same week as the football World Cup started and the Force supported #TheGoal – a national campaign which called for all men to join the team to end violence against women and girls.

It was explained that Sussex Police formally became one of the 14 Operation Soteria Bluestone pathfinder forces in October 2022 to improve outcomes for victims of rape and sexual offences across England and Wales. The Force is continuing to complete and submit monthly performance metrics to Operation Soteria and recently completed both a ‘peer review’ [of Hampshire Constabulary] and a ‘self-assessment’ [completed by the national Operation Soteria team, including a peer review by Gwent Constabulary]. JS agreed to share copies of the two reports with KB when these are made available to the Force next year. Following the publication of the self-assessment report, Sussex Police will enter an ‘improvement phase’ that will involve working with Operation Soteria Bluestone to develop an improvement plan for delivery in June 2023.

Earlier this week [15 December 2022], an independent Operation Soteria Bluestone – Year One Report was published which outlined the findings from the first year of the policing aspects of Operation Soteria. Although the report was recognised to be “professionally uncomfortable” for the police service, JS provided KB with assurances that Sussex Police are always striving for continuous improvement in this incredibly challenging and complex area to provide a better service to victims of rape and sexual offences. Further information can be viewed through the following link:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/operation-soteria-year-one-report>

STALKING AND HARASSMENT

Stalking and harassment are offences that are committed when an individual repeatedly behaves in a way that makes another individual feel scared, distressed or threatened.

A. What are Sussex Police doing to raise awareness of stalking and harassment amongst police officers and staff? How many single points of contact do Sussex Police across the Force? And what information, guidance and practical advice is made available to officers and staff around stalking and harassment?

B. Stalking Protection Orders provide the police service with a formal intervention to improve the safety of stalking victims. What impact have these orders made to victims of stalking? How many orders have been secured during 2022 to date? How does this compare to 2021? How many of these orders remain active? And how many of these orders were breached?

C. Sussex Police developed a new stalking screening tool in partnership with Surrey Police, Cheshire Constabulary and the College of Policing which has now been made available to six more police forces. What impact has the tool made to frontline officers?

D. How effective has the multi-agency Stalking Clinic been at providing investigating officers with early advice, guidance and support to enable the best case to be presented since its establishment earlier this year?

E. What impact has the monthly Stalking Scrutiny Panel had in terms of examining closed cases to improve the response provided to victims, bring more offenders to justice and identify any learning [both individual and thematic] and/or share best practice?

F. Dr Jane Monckton-Smith has developed a domestic homicide timeline. How are Sussex Police using this timeline? And what difference has this made to the Force response?

G. Sussex is one of the few police forces that has a stalking perpetrator programme. How effective has this programme been in Sussex?

H. What do the number of recorded offences, arrests and solved rates look like for stalking and harassment? How do these compare to previous years?

The Chief Constable explained that stalking behaviours are acknowledged to be intertwined and interrelated with harassment and intimidation offences, with all actions recognised to have the potential to cause victims [and their families] physical, emotional and psychological harm. JS provided the following definitions in respect of stalking and harassment:

Stalking – *is a series of behaviours that are fixated, obsessive, unwanted and repeated [FOUR] by an individual and/or group toward another specific individual that would cause a reasonable person to fear for their safety or cause significant alarm, harassment or distress to the victim.*

Harassment – *is unwanted or repeated contact without a reasonable purpose or actions undertaken that make an individual feel distressed, humiliated, threatened and/or fearful of further violence. This can include the following actions: phone calls, letters, emails, visits, stalking, verbal abuse [including contact through social media], threats, damage to property and bodily harm.*

Sussex Police have sought to raise police officer and staff awareness of stalking and harassment offences by making a wide range of information available through the Sussex Police intranet and continued support for national and local campaigns. This included support for Stalking Awareness Week [between 25 – 29 April 2022] which highlighted the vital role that stalking advocates play in 'bridging the gap' between victims and the criminal justice system. Further information can be viewed through the following link: <https://www.sussex-pcc.gov.uk/about/news/national-stalking-awareness-week/>

Since June 2021, Sussex Police has also delivered multiple internal media campaigns in relation to stalking and harassment to emphasise the benefits of stalking protection orders (SPOs), celebrate the work of the Public Protection Unit [in response to high-risk stalking offences], raise awareness of the Stalking Clinic and Stalking Scrutiny Panel and to highlight the precarious links between stalking and homicide. Further campaigns are currently being developed for delivery in 2023.

The Force currently has 92 dedicated single points of contact (SPOC) for stalking – with individuals having received enhanced levels of training around the identification of stalking offences and investigative tactics – to provide specialist knowledge, guidance and advice to support the workforce with investigations. A further 20 SPOCs will be trained next year to increase the resources available in this area further still. Each of the Response and Neighbourhood Policing Teams also has access to further information, guidance and practical advice about stalking and harassment through Crewmate – an application on their Mobile Data Terminals [smartphones].

Earlier this year [June 2022], a Safe:Space Sussex app was launched to help and assist individuals should they feel unsafe when outside of their homes. The app has been developed following detailed consultation with partners and members of the public regarding the safety of women and girls in Sussex and can be downloaded using the following quick response (QR) code:



The Stalking Protection Act 2019 introduced SPOs in January 2020 to provide the police service with an earlier formal intervention to improve the safety of all stalking victims. These court orders – which can be obtained either as an interim or full order – contain a combination of prohibited activities and positive requirements focused on individual behaviours.

Sussex Police have applied for 40 SPOs during 2022 to date, of which 18 of these orders have been secured [45%]. There are currently 61 perpetrators in Sussex with active SPOs [either interim or full orders], with a further 12 applications still awaiting court proceedings. Since their inception, Sussex Police has made 114 applications for SPOs, with 66 of these orders having been secured [58%]. Several of the SPOs issued in Sussex have also included the requirement for offenders to participate in stalking perpetrator programmes.

There are many reasons for an unsuccessful SPO application. This can include perpetrator imprisonment for a longer period, restraining/non-molestation orders secured in a criminal case, victim has entered back into or remained in a relationship with the subject and instances where the police are unable to locate subject/respondent has left the country.

The Chief Constable confirmed that there have been 22 breaches of SPOs in Sussex during the year for stalking-related offences [compared to 34 breaches in 2021]. Perpetrators are managed by an Offender Manager from the CDASU who will visit the perpetrators, check compliance against the orders and, where breaches are suspected or reported, will investigate these with a view to taking position action in a timely manner.

If an SPO is found to be breached, the police have powers to arrest an individual and secure evidence of the breach that could result in criminal consequences, with perpetrators facing either a fine, imprisonment [for a maximum of five years] and/or both. Any breaches of the orders are managed through the Daily Management Meetings [on each of the three policing divisions], with safeguarding checks made with the victims and ad hoc 'spot visits' to known offenders. This approach demonstrates that these breaches continue to be taken seriously by Sussex Police.

Sussex Police developed and piloted a new stalking screening tool in partnership with Surrey Police, Cheshire Constabulary and the College of Policing (CoP) in September 2020. The tool provides officers with a series of screening questions to support decision-making around the identification of stalking offences, behaviours and an assessment of the risk presented. The tool has been embedded into the day-to-day working practices in Sussex, with the increasingly widespread use of this platform recognised to have assisted frontline officers to identify better offending behaviour and any associated risks.

The screening tool has also now been made available to a further six police force areas in England and Wales – bringing the total to 9 forces. KB confirmed that the CoP will formally evaluate the tool, ahead of a final decision being taken as to whether to adopt this tool nationally. JS confirmed that the Force will continue to use the tool in the interim ahead of the results of the formal evaluation being made available. Further information can be viewed on the College of Policing website through the following link:

<https://www.college.police.uk/app/major-investigation-and-public-protection/stalking-or-harassment>

The Chief Constable confirmed that Sussex Police has established a multi-agency Stalking Clinic to safeguard better victims, make victims feel safer and to provide investigating officers with early advice, guidance and support to progress investigations efficiently and effectively. The clinic comprises representatives from Veritas Justice [a community organisation providing support, advocacy and advice for individuals affected by stalking], Weightmans [Force solicitors], Crown Prosecution Service (CPS), Probation Service, Interventions Alliance, local authority housing services, mental health professionals and officers from several different policing teams.

Following its establishment [in November 2021], the Stalking Clinic has considered and discussed 41 complex cases, with 16 applications subsequently made for SPOs [and four of these orders having been granted] to date. As a direct result of the strategic direction provided by the clinic, 9 cases have either been presented to the CPS or are currently being prepared for submission to CPS for a charging decision in a timelier manner. JS stated that she would like to see a greater number of complex cases discussed at the clinic because of the positive impact the investment in this area has already delivered.

JS highlighted that a monthly Stalking Scrutiny Panel has also been created to examine closed cases in detail to improve the response provided to victims, bring more offenders to justice and to identify and share any learning and/or best practice. The panel brings together representatives from each of the three policing divisions and the Public Protection Unit to examine up to 10 closed cases at each of the meetings [i.e., cases that have already been through the criminal justice system].

The panel provides immediate feedback on the cases [and their outcomes] for the relevant division which is disseminated through local processes to individual investigating officers, teams and their supervisors. A broader organisational learning report will also be developed [when a greater number of cases have been reviewed] which will inform Force policy and ongoing continuous professional development. The need to obtain early advice from the stalking SPOC, improvements to tasking processes and enhancements to the performance dashboard were all identified following scrutiny at these meetings and have contributed towards the provision of better support for victims. A further two closed cases were also reopened following the identification of additional lines of enquiries and/or the need for additional safeguarding measures to be implemented.

The Chief Constable explained that Sussex Police are looking to embed the homicide timeline in all work undertaken around stalking and harassment. The timeline is a pioneering model which transforms the way domestic homicide, coercive control and stalking are considered and how the risks created by these situations are assessed. The Force has developed a briefing and made this available to all officers and staff on the intranet to assist them with the identification of specific risk factors that may suggest an escalation in risk during a relationship. This includes a video of Dr Monckton-Smith explaining what the timeline is and potential triggers that should be considered by investigating officers [i.e., perpetrator history, early relationship/current relationship, behavioural escalation and changes to perpetrator thinking]. The timeline is also recognised to be intrinsically linked with the time investigation grid [i.e., approximate time measurements allocated to various behaviours and actions undertaken by a stalker to better quantify the cumulative level of risk posed to a victim].

The compulsive and obsessive behaviour intervention (COBI) programme – delivered by Interventions Alliance – is suitable for individuals who display stalking behaviours. The schemes have identified that many offenders have multiple complex needs [i.e., mental health and/or substance misuse issues] and has been shown to reduce stalking-related behaviours where positive engagement with the perpetrator programmes exists.

JS confirmed that four individuals have completed the stalking perpetrator programme in Sussex to date, with a further four individuals currently undertaking the course. Another six individuals are currently awaiting a suitability assessment, including one individual who has volunteered to complete the course, rather than having been mandated through a condition within the SPO. It was highlighted that the number of perpetrators engaged in this programme could be higher – this is not assisted by frequent challenge from legal teams that to agree to participate in the programme [in advance of a criminal justice outcome] would amount to an admission of guilt and that, post-conviction, participation is unduly onerous given the other sanctions already imposed. The court backlog and delays to cases reaching court were also attributed to these reduced numbers.

KB was reassured to note that the Force will continue to actively use all disruption opportunities available to them to robustly target wider criminal behaviours to reduce the nature and frequency of offending behaviour and the level of associated harm for those individuals who decided not to engage in the programme.

Sussex Police demonstrated an arrest rate of 46.0% for the 2,051 stalking offences recorded across the rolling year period 1 December 2021 to 30 November 2022, with a solved rate of 10.2%. This compared favourably to the 45.5% arrest rate and 10.7% solved rate demonstrated for the 2,299 offences recorded across the previous rolling year. For offences of harassment, the Force returned an arrest rate of 11.6% for the 5,168 offences recorded across the same period, with a 5.2% solved rate. This represented a slight reduction from the 12.4% arrest rate from the 4,075 offences recorded in the 12-month period before, with a solved rate of 7.0%. Several evidence-led prosecutions have also been secured for stalking and harassment offences in Sussex, although the numbers were not known at the PAM.

It was recognised that more work is required to improve these solved rates. This is expected to be delivered through Operation Unify and a greater focus on those offences where there are more realistic opportunities to solving these crimes. The Force continue to regularly monitor the arrest and solved rates for both offences throughout Sussex and remain aware of the strong correlation between those instances where a suspect is arrested and instances that achieve a positive outcome [solved rate]. KB was also reassured to note that 'dip checks' are undertaken on all occasions where arrests are not made for stalking offences to ensure that the decision-making was appropriate and proportionate to the circumstances involved.

ACTION: KB would like to know the number of evidence-led prosecutions that have been secured for stalking and harassment offences in Sussex.

INFORMATION ACCESS REQUESTS

My office continues to receive concerns from members of the public regarding delays in the processing of requests for information under both the Freedom of Information Act 2000 and Data Protection Act 2018.

A. Can you provide me with a summary of the scale and volume of requests for information received by Sussex Police? How is the Information Access Team performing against the statutory timescales provided for all types of requests? And what backlogs, if any, currently exist for these requests?

B. What is Sussex Police doing to progress all requests for information received in a timely manner? What improvements have been made to internal processes? And what challenges exist to respond within the deadlines?

The Chief Constable confirmed that Sussex Police is now in a "much better position" than it was previously in respect of requests for information, with much of this improvement attributed to the recruitment of a new Head of Information Management [Martin Brazier] in January 2022.

[To provide some context] The Information Access Team respond to a wide range of requests for information each month including circa 140 freedom of information (FOI) requests, 100 subject access requests (SARs), 85 disclosure requests for family court orders, 125 disclosures to support the Criminal Injuries Compensation Authority (CICA), 25 'fitness to practice' requests from regulatory bodies and 25 requests for policing data from solicitors and insurance companies. The demand for information was recognised to have increased significantly over the past year across each of the workstreams, with the Information Access Team currently managing approximately 500 cumulative requests for information each month.

It was highlighted that the Force makes every effort to respond to each of the requests received within the statutory timescales provided [20 working days for FOI requests and one calendar month for SARs]. However, some of the issues around the timeliness of the responses provided by the Force are set against a continued increase in the volume and complexity of the requests.

Many of the requests for information are recognised to be multi-faceted, sensitive and/or relating to digital information which can take a "huge amount of time" to locate, recover, redact and process the information requested from different departments before a response is prepared and any additional context provided. This task may also include the requirement to pixelate police custody CCTV and Body Worn Video footage and/or seeking further clarification regarding the information requested, terminology and definitions used by the requestor and/or refocussing the request to be more specific in some instances when this is too broad.

The Chief Constable acknowledged the ongoing requirement from the Information Commissioner's Office (ICO) for Sussex Police to improve the timeliness of its responses to all requests for information, although the quality of the police responses provided were recognised to be positive and compliant in all cases by the ICO.

It was highlighted that a backlog continues to remain for each of the different request areas, although Sussex Police and the Information Access Team are working hard to reduce these. The Force demonstrated a 56% reduction in the backlog of FOI requests [from January 2022 to November 2022] and a 17% reduction in the backlog of disclosure requests for family court orders [from September 2022 to November 2022]. However, the backlog for SARs was acknowledged to have increased by 103% between January 2022 to November 2022, owing to the increased number and complexity of the requests received.

Part of the police precept for 2022/23 was made available to increase the capacity and capability of the Information Access Team by three additional posts to respond to the increased number of requests for information and to reduce the existing backlogs. [As of October 2022] The Information Access Team is now at full establishment, with these additional resources already contributing to improved performance. This has included enhancements made to internal triage processes to enable the Force to respond to simple requests at the earliest possible opportunity and to return any invalid requests in a timely manner, together with clearing a greater number of outstanding cases from the backlog.

KB concluded by stating that she will continue to monitor the progress and performance of Sussex Police in this important area.

2023/24 PRECEPT CONSULTATION

KB confirmed that a public consultation has been launched to find out whether local taxpayers would be prepared to pay more to support policing in Sussex.

Once closed, KB is duty-bound to inform the Sussex Police & Crime Panel of her considerations. This decision will be reviewed by the Panel at their meeting on Friday, 27 January 2023.

The consultation will remain open until Tuesday, 10 January 2023 and can be viewed through the following link:

<https://www.sussex-pcc.gov.uk/about/news/have-your-say-on-police-funding-precept-survey-202324/>

CHRISTMAS MESSAGE

KB also thanked the police officers and staff working over the holiday period to ensure that we all remain safe in Sussex and wished both the viewers and the officers and staff of Sussex Police a happy and healthy Christmas.

NEXT UP:

The next PAM is on Friday, 20 January 2023 at 13:00. Further information can be viewed through the following link: www.sussex-pcc.gov.uk/get-involved/watch-live/