



Working for the Community in Rotherfield, Mark Cross, Eridge Green, Boarshead and surrounding areas

NOTES FROM A PUBLIC MEETING WITH THE SUSSEX POLICE AND CRIME COMMISSIONER, KATY BOURNE, HELD IN ROTHERFIELD VILLAGE HALL ON TUESDAY, 4TH SEPTEMBER 2018

SUSSEX POLICE AND CRIME COMMISSIONER

Katie Bourne (KB)

ROTHERFIELD PARISH COUNCILLORS.

Cllr. Robert Harris (Chair of the Parish Council), Cllr. Louise Henrick (Vice chair of the Parish Council), Cllr. Adam Hardy, Cllr. Norman Wickenden, Cllr. James Kitchenham, Cllr. David Hiles, Cllr. Adrian Martin and Cllr. Glen Farmer.

WEALDEN DISTRICT COUNCILLOR

Cllr. Phil Dixon.

20 Parishioners also attended.

The meeting was chaired by Cllr. Harris.

Question:

Ms. Bourne, the Sussex Police and Crime Commissioner (PCC), was asked to give an outline of the local policing model, the perception being that our nearest Police Station was the one at Eastbourne.

Pre-Christmas 2017 Sussex Police was in a very different financial position to where it is currently. Savings were being sought and staff numbers were being cut. 2010, the year when Police Officer numbers were at an all-time high, is the year on which most press reports focus regarding officer numbers. In the previous ten years there had been record investment and recruitment, realistically this was unsustainable.

Until Christmas 2017 the hands of the PCC were tied as to where funding could be sought to recruit more staff. The Police budget is made up of 61% Government grant with the balancing 39% funded by the Police precept element of the local council tax. PCC could only source funding from local council tax, and only by the set maximum amount of 2%. However, as Sussex Police were in the bottom quarter of the table for funding of Police Forces in the UK, the PCC was permitted to raise the figure by £5 per household per year. This approximated to a 3 ½ % increase which has also been the case for the past three years. These funds were focused on areas which the Sussex public had identified as being important to them. These were a cybercrime unit and public protection officers trained to deal with domestic and sexual abuse – the latter has seen a large increase in the numbers reported, with a 30% rise noted in reported serious sexual offences in the past year.

At Christmas 2017 PCCs across the Country lobbied hard for removal of the cap on police funding via the local tax precept – the sum raised by the 3 ½ % noted above only approximated to an additional £3m for Sussex Police, a small sum when compared to the Force's £250m annual budget. £1m approximates to the annual cost of ten officers.

The PCC's lobbying succeeded in getting the annual funding cap to be raised to £12 per household – the figure for a "Band D" household into which 75% of those in Sussex fall with the

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sum greater for the higher tax bands. Public consultation disclosed that 65% of Council taxpayers were happy to pay more subject to it being spent on local policing.

Three years ago, the “Local Policing Model” was restructured to reflect new types of crime such as online fraud, a rapidly increasing area of Crime. The Chief Constable worked with around 200 Officers to design this new Model. Feedback on this “model” is welcomed, Sussex can no longer afford to have “one officer per village”. Police Community Support Officers (Pcso’s) now have enhanced powers and the perception of them has improved and there are around 200 across the County.

Internet based “Cyber Crime”, domestic abuse cases, serial sexual offences and serious child abuse have also shown a significant increase. The last category increased significantly after autumn 2012 post “Jimmy Saville” and “Operation Yew Tree”. There has been an increase in the reporting of “historic” crimes of this nature which nationally are costing around £1bn annually to investigate – a large proportion of the National Police budget.

Acknowledged that introduction of the “Local Policing Model” had not run smoothly but that matters are now settling down. Our local District Commander is Chief Inspector Anita Turner and the PCC has emphasised to these Commanders that the public like visible policing.

Regarding the shoplifting incident in Crowborough she has asked to hear the conversations between victim and Police call centre to hear exactly what went on between the victim and call centre before being able to declare views on how the event was dealt with. Since the event 9 youths aged between 14 and 17 have been arrested and bailed (with curfew conditions) to appear in court at the end of September.

Regarding recruitment, £17m has been taken from reserves which, in addition to the funds raised by Police Precept via Council Tax, will allow 200 more officers in four years’ time. Annual turnover of Officers is in the order of 150 per year and to cover these losses the Police will required to recruit 200 Officers per year. This raises challenges as experienced officers are needed from front line duties to support and train the new officers.

Question:

Pcso starting salary is around £23K. I cannot remember when a Police Officer was seen in the Village since the loss of our Pcso. Concerned that we are not proactive enough, for example in the case mentioned above.

Frustration are shared regarded matters such as this. Sadly, any action taken may well be viewed as “badges of honour” to the miscreants. For example, a local offender had eight behavioural orders against them at age 17, but the only options are an order such as this or prison. Behavioural orders are not managed by the Police but it is considered that, subject to being granted funds to do so, the Police could manage these orders better than the body currently doing so.

Challenge is to take preventative actions regarding young offending and anti-social behaviour, but this is not solely down to the Police. Wealden District Council operate the “Community Safety Partnership” which meets on a regular basis – bodies involved these meetings are Police, Council, Housing department, education, youth offending teams and health service together with voluntary sector organisations. A lot of the funding for the Partnership comes

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from the PCC's office and this funding has been increased significantly for the next two years - improved results will be expected consequently and she will be challenging the Partnership, together with the Police, to achieve these.

The current focus of the Partnership is on Road Safety and KB would like the balance to shift to place greater emphasis on addressing anti-social behaviour. She is meeting with the Chief Constable tomorrow and a report will be provided to him and the District Commander regarding the concerns raised at this meeting.

Question.

The resident posing the question stated that they felt lucky living in Rotherfield and feels perfectly safe. However, he had attended a recent talk at their son's school in Tunbridge Wells by a drugs specialist and was scared at the effect of drugs on the young in the community and wondered if any anti-social behaviour in the Village could be attributed to this?

KB agreed that drugs are a big issue. "County Lines" is a term that may be familiar and has been a growing issue over the last ten years in Sussex and other areas. The term refers to drugs rings in London and other cities looking outside their area to identify areas for which there may be a demand for drugs from the young and/or vulnerable. Local dealers may be exploited and their bases "taken over" to enable them to exploit young users by providing them with mobile phones to set up a supply network, mainly of "Class A" drugs such as crack cocaine and heroin.

These "County Lines" can average a daily income of £3K and rely on paying the young users in kind or in goods and deliberately getting them into debt so that they continue to co-operate.

KB advised that there is a local policing team which police Crowborough and its surrounding communities, and the Police Station at Crowborough is open 10:00 – 14:00 on weekdays. In response to a query regarding the short opening hours **KB** informed that most Police contact, and reports is via telephone or "on line" to the Police Control Centre at Lewes which is manned 24/7 and deals with "999" and "101" calls. Unfortunately, around 40% of calls that they receive are not concerning matters that the Police are responsible for dealing with.

Question.

Pcso used to visit the Village School on a regular basis and built up a very good rapport with the pupils but suddenly the Pcso presence ceased.

KB reported that this activity had ceased as part of the change in the local policing model. There are now "Youth Prevention Officers" who tend to concentrate on children of secondary school age. Promised to make District Commander aware of the position and asked to contact the School. Sadly, the the age at which crimes are being committed is falling – recent shoplifting gang in Littlehampton had a 10-year-old ringleader. Lack of respect of both parents and Police is an unfortunate "sign of the times".

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Question.

There is little sign of a visible Police presence, particularly in the northern part of the county.

The Police used to be seen on an almost weekly presence on Crowborough Hill undertaking speed checks, but the perception was that they had “drifted down” toward the Hailsham and Eastbourne area.

KB enquired as to what we would like to see the Police doing? Advised that Police were still here – Speedwatch is still active elsewhere and the recommended contact is Steve O’ Connell if Rotherfield wished to revive the Village Speedwatch team. The key issue for the Police is reduction in numbers and increase in demand therefore they are more reliant to report incidents and become involved in initiatives such as “Speedwatch”.

Question.

Where are Pcso’s now based.

KB responded that the Pcso’s are expected to be much more visible and mobile. In general, a lot of Policing is not immediately obvious, example was quoted of an operation in Hastings earlier this year involving many Officers being deployed but which had not been visible to the public. Police had tried to raise profiles of their local Policing team and posters have been produced giving details of the team members and the various ways of contacting them.

During the water problem earlier in the year a Councillor had tried to contact Police to request a presence as he had been concerned that there could be public order issues arising from the queues for bottled water in the Village but had given up with the “101” number after 25’. **KB** suggested that in the circumstances described a call to “999” would have been appropriate and should be used for “live” incidents. **KB** acknowledged that there had problems nationally with “101”.

Question.

Is there any “cross border” co-operation, particularly in the North of the County near to Kent?

KB reported that Sussex Police tend to collaborate with Surrey Police, Kent Police using a different computer system which hinders efforts to liaise. Striking a balance in allocation resources is hard to do but she is listening to concerns and share them with the Commander of the Local Policing Team. It is difficult to satisfy the needs of all areas as they all consider that they experience the most crime.

Question.

What work is being done to establish a National Police Service?

There already several nationwide organisations such as the National Crime Agency focusing on serious organised crime, also the Cyber Security Unit dealing with online crime. The British Transport Police are a national body, as are the Border Force. There are no plans for a “National Police Service”.

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Question.

How is Sussex Police tackling rural crime?

A recent nationwide Survey of Rural Crime published its results last month and Sussex provided the second highest number of respondents. The main concern when the survey was undertaken four years ago was speeding, somewhat surprisingly the main concern expressed in the recent survey related to fly tipping which is a District Council issue. Sussex Police are reviewing the policing of rural areas, those in these areas deserve to feel as safe as thought in urban areas. The review is to be published very shortly. Aim is to get officers trained specifically to deal with rural crimes. **KB** and the Chief Constable meet regularly with the Country Landowners Association and National Farmers Union to receive their concerns.

Question.

“Zig Zag” markings and signage in front of local schools. Had contacted the Police, who considered that responsibility for enforcement laid Wealden District Council; Wealden claimed that East Sussex County Council bore the responsibility which they in turn denied. On contacting our County Councillor he confirmed that it is a Police responsibility but one that only would only be addressed if a “life or death” matter. Did ESCC consult the Police as to whether enforcement could be resourced by them before spending on these measures?

KB reported that the Department for Communities and Local Government had, a few years ago, recommended that parking should no longer be a criminal offence but redesignated as a civil one with enforcement undertaken by local authorities; fines imposed would fund the enforcement measures.

There are now only five local authorities who have not adopted this approach and two of these are in Sussex – Wealden and Rother Districts. In Wealden parking on yellow lines remains a criminal offence with the Police responsible for enforcing and, due to demands on their resources, this rarely occurs.

Several years ago, the Chief Constable approached both Wealden and Rother District Councils to encourage them to take over responsibility for parking control/enforcement and offered a changeover period of eighteen months during which the Police would continue to enforce. This offer was declined. Whilst technically the matter remains with the Police resource pressures mean that issuing of parking tickets is not a priority. It is noted that Rother District Council have now agreed to take on parking enforcement and the process has begun to implement this measure which also involves ESCC. It is understood that it is not a condition of Civil Parking Enforcement that adoption means that parking charges are introduced in Council car parks.

Regarding resourcing for this and other issues **KB** advised that East Sussex pay the fifth lowest amount in Council Tax applicable to Policing and receive the seventh lowest funding for the Police from Central Government. In the view of **KB**, the “Fair Funding Formula” which calculates funding based on area need needs reviewing.

Question.

Concerns that “Operation Crackdown” would now only accept speeding reports if they could be verified independently either by a roadside interactive sign or vehicle speedometer. Justification was queried but no response had been received.

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CLERK to remind **KB** who will research and report.

Obstructive parking issues at Eridge Station were a concern that emergency vehicle access could be an issue. **KB** stressed the importance of reporting such issues as the volume of reports from an area could provide the spur for Police action.

There was also a positive report regarding a dangerous overtaking incident reported by a Parishioner. This had been followed up by the Police who had fed back a progress report to the Parishioner.

Question.

Considered that KB had an “easy ride” this evening. Based on personal experience and contact with officers he considered that Police offer morale was low due to under resourcing and that responses will continue to be reactive.

KB acknowledged concerns and advised that Sussex Police were in investment mode and, although change would not happen overnight, in four years' time there would be 200 additional officers in neighbourhoods, 1/3 of the workforce would be new and this would offer opportunities for culture change. Acknowledged that Police Officers, along with many other public-sector workers, were overworked and underpaid. Morale boosting was the remit of the Chief Constable, part of **KB's** role is to be the “fundraiser”, agree/allocate budgets and agree the Force's priorities which, based on the public view, is local policing. **KB** directs and prioritises that which Sussex wishes delivered; the plan as to how this is to be done is then agreed with the Chief Constable who is responsible for operational matters. As with other public sector organisations difficult decisions need to be made.

By comparison to the local authorities policing locally is in a stronger position as it has been able to raise further funding via Council Tax up to the Government set “cap”. Another Parishioner suggested that the local commander be invited to spend a day in the Community and visit locations such as schools and other areas of the community. The role of **KB** doesn't permit her to direct the Local Commander, this being an operational matter, but she will make a request. Regarding the growing number of building developments nearby in Crowborough applications will be made for Section 106 funds from developers to go toward police funds – prior to **KB's** appointment no applications for such funding had been made but now applications are made routinely and consequently the Police's funds have received several million pounds. Acknowledges that district councils can be “difficult” as there are frequent rule changes for regarding application process and qualification.

Question.

Will the increase of 200 Officers over the next few years how will these be deployed to achieve the wished for local police presence?

KB advised that the Local Policing Model relies on greater flexibility with more officer mobility rather than being Police Station based. Paper copies of the Chief Constables promise to the public over the next four years are available at the meeting, details are also available online.

Regarding “visible policing” **KB** stated that research had shown that it doesn't reduce crime, but it does improve public confidence which is currently being challenged, particularly by the

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media. There is a dearth of positive police news published and she considers that this does not reflect the current situation in Sussex. Whilst acknowledging that the “front line” had received many changes and challenge most officers do still love their career and she is willing to take on employment issues on their behalf in conjunction with the Police Federation.

Question.

Apart from the 200 extra officers which are expected what other changes/developments does KB anticipate over the coming years?

Her personal view is that we will see more Police processes moving “on line” such as the reporting of crimes; this will be challenging to deal with. Regarding internet/cybercrime **KB** believes that we may be viewing the “tip of the iceberg” at present; stalking/harassment on line will become more of an issue, involving all ages. Around 90% of the internet is not used by the general community and much of this is “dark web” used for criminal activity – how is this to be policed and funded in future?

Although social media is excellent at sharing information how much of it is accurate? **KB** hopes that the Police will be more proactive in the field to address these issues.

Concerns expressed by a Councillor at the perceived lack of interest of the Police in rural crime. Had personally experienced three burglaries over the past year but has not received a visit from Police Officers for any of them – he feels that these are considered “spent crimes” by the Police with little chance of the perpetrators being caught. There is a feeling of “abandonment” by the Police in rural areas, and that certain elements of the community feel they are beyond the law.

KB recognises that this is a challenge for Sussex Police to be more visible, particularly in rural communities. If the message from communities is that the “Local Policing Model” does not appear to be working for rural areas of the County this would be a matter for **KB** to challenge with the Chief Constable as an operational matter for him and his officers to address.

KB was thanked and applauded by those present, also thanked by the Chair for her openness, listening to the concerns of those present and providing honest answers to their questions.

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