

REPORT OF THE SUSSEX POLICE AUTHORITY

The Sussex Police Authority met at County Hall, Lewes, on 18 December 2008.

Attendances:

Mr L Barnard (Chairman), Mr P Bratton, Prof G Bull, Dr L Bush (Vice-Chairman), Ms E Daniel, Mr B Duncan, Mr F Faiz, Mr P Jones, Mr J Mortimer, Mr A Price JP, Mr D Rogers OBE, Mrs C Shaves MBE JP, Mr G Theobald OBE, Mr R Tidy, Mr S Waight and Dr R Walker.

1 Constitution of Police Authorities

1.1 The Authority has welcomed the decision by the Home Secretary to abandon her plans to introduce direct elections to police authorities in England and Wales. The Authority was in the forefront with the Association of Police Authorities and the Local Government Association in opposing the introduction of direct elections, which would have compromised the uniquely balanced accountability provided through the current composition of police authorities which works in the interests of everyone in our communities.

2 Public Consultation and Communication Meetings – Autumn 2008

2.1 The Authority seeks to access the views of a wide range of communities and groups in Sussex, to hear their views on policing priorities and ensure that they are reflected in the Local Policing Plan (LPP) and budget discussions. An extensive programme of consultation events was held during the Autumn across Sussex. The Authority has moved away from the more traditional 'public meeting' format to more pro-active and innovative ways to engage with members of the public. This recognises the fact that the Authority needs to go to the public rather than expect the public to come to the Authority. Working alongside Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnerships, the Authority has attended event in shopping centres, theatres, colleges, farmers' markets and other venues.

2.2 A summary of all the feedback from recent events can be found on the Authority's website. The new format for consultation and community engagement has resulted in a dramatic increase in the number of people (1698) the Authority has engaged with, compared with 513 people who attended the previous programme of more traditional consultation events. The current programme of engagement is far more successful, with valuable face-to-face exchanges and conversations with a wider cross section of the community and, importantly, including families and young people.

2.3 In addition the Authority's on-line public survey went live in Summer 2008 and, so far, 559 responses have been received. The survey reinforces the feedback from public events which demonstrates that the biggest issues experienced in neighbourhoods are parking, speeding and traffic problems. It is significant to note that the majority of respondents (62%) say they would be prepared to pay an extra 10p per month in order to fund specific improvements in delivering policing. Over a third of this sub-group (37%) would prefer this extra funding to be in support of local policing. The views of the public have been used to develop policies in the draft Local Policing Plan and preparation for the budget which will be considered at the Police Authority meeting on 12 February, 2009.

3. Policing Activity in Sussex

3.1 The Police Authority has received a report from the Chief Constable Martin Richards QPM on policing activities in Sussex including the following issues. A full copy of the report is available on the Authority's website and provides a comprehensive overview of the initiatives and success of Sussex Police in tackling crime.

Emergency and non-emergency calls

3.2 Between July and October 2008, Sussex Police received 89,133 emergency 999 calls, answering 96.3% within the target time of 10 seconds. The average wait time dropped slightly from 4.6 seconds to 4.5 seconds. The National Policing Improvement Agency (NPIA) national returns for the period April to September 2008 show that Sussex is currently the third best performing force in England and Wales and the best performing force in the South East. Between July and October 2008, Sussex Police received 204,729 non-emergency calls, answering 74.5% within the target time of 60 seconds. The average time to answer non-emergency calls is 65.5 seconds.

Partnership Working

3.3 Sussex Police continues to work in partnership with local authorities and other agencies across Sussex and the Chief Constable's report highlighted many of these collaborations. For example, Sussex Police is working with Brighton and Hove City Council to tackle youth crime and anti-social behaviour. Police patrols will be enhanced in hotspots for youth problems and at school closing times. Discussions have also begun to develop a role, funded by the University of Brighton, for a Police Community Support Officer to work with the University's Community Liaison Officer. The aim is to improve the integration of students in the city and ensure that community issues are dealt with effectively.

Neighbourhood Panels

3.4 Neighbourhood Panels are being introduced across Sussex. In Eastbourne the panels have been designed around 21 natural neighbourhoods. This work has taken place with the full support and co-operation of Eastbourne Borough Council and the Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnership. The setting of neighbourhood priorities will include local people, and help communities influence the nature and style of policing in their neighbourhoods.

Gatwick Policing

3.5 Sussex Police remain totally committed to working with airport partners to ensure the airport is a safe and secure environment for all airport users, and a hostile environment to terrorism. Gatwick has a 24 hour policing operation to provide protective security measures.

3.6 During 2008, Gatwick police have run Operation Griffin which provides airport staff with information on current threat levels and other related issues. There have been 'Griffin days' every month in 2008 with over 800 attendees, including staff from Gatwick Airport and members of the Authority. The scheme has achieved international recognition.

Specialist Search Unit (SSU)

3.7 The SSU provides a major resource to Sussex Police. As an example, in August the SSU was tasked to search eighteen tonnes of domestic waste at a domestic refuse site in an attempt to locate a suspected murder weapon. Against all the odds, this weapon was found amongst the rubbish in a most unfavourable and demanding working environment and the offender is currently on remand for this offence. Volunteer search teams are also a valuable resource to Sussex Police and have recently supported large-scale police operations across Sussex.

Automatic Number Plate Recognition (ANPR)

3.8 Between July and October 2008, 133 arrests were made for a variety of offences, varying from no insurance to armed robbery.

3.9 The Sussex ANPR team has also been involved in a number of joint force operations, working with Hampshire on the county border, and these have provided some excellent results. On 3 November, Operation Utah resulted in 87 vehicles being stopped, two people were arrested and seven vehicles were seized. 29 vehicles were prohibited and there was also a number of other offences dealt with by way of summons or fixed penalty notices.

4. Special Constabulary

4.1 Special Constables (Specials) are a vital part of Sussex Police. Specials have the same powers as regular officers and provide a significant additional resource to help police Sussex. The Specials population for Sussex currently stands at 239 and the proposed target is to have 300 Specials by March 2009.

4.2 Employer Supported Policing (ESP), which was recently launched in Brighton, encourages staff at all levels of business and organisations to volunteer to be ESP Special Constables and, once trained, to carry out patrols in key areas during their usual working hours. They provide reassurance to the public. Employers such as HSBC Bank and Mothercare have contributed to their staff's time for training and one day a fortnight for patrols. It is hoped that this initiative will be rolled out across Sussex in the future, and this aspiration is supported by the Authority.

Cadets

4.3 There are six cadet units in Sussex covering Hastings, Eastbourne, Brighton and Hove, Crawley, Shoreham and Worthing, and Bognor and Chichester. Cadets are aged 14-18 years old and come from a wide range of backgrounds and have proved invaluable in assisting with test purchasing, marshalling and local policing events.

Volunteers

4.4 Sussex Police also work closely with volunteers in order to increase capacity and also to strengthen links with the communities those volunteers represent. Where possible past experience and skills are utilised and a new structure has been developed for liaising and providing support to Neighbourhood Watch schemes recognising the very considerable contribution they can make.

Annual Audit Letter 2007-08

5.1 The Authority has received the Annual Audit Letter for 2007/08 which reflects the strong position previously reported to the Authority following the Audit Commission's Annual Governance Report for 2007/08. Notable practice continues to be identified in the way the Authority and Force approach both the organisation and management of their activities. In particular, the Audit Letter draws attention to the way the Authority and Force have involved stakeholders in identifying substantial efficiency savings and service improvements through the Challenge Programme.

5.2 The Audit Commission's 'use of resources' assessment indicates that the Authority's approach to meeting financial challenges is strong which should provide some resilience in dealing with the consequences of the financial challenges facing the national economy. The Police Authority has achieved the highest score (4) awarded by the Audit Commission which signifies that the Authority is performing strongly. A copy of the Annual Audit Letter is on the Authority's website.

LIONEL BARNARD
CHAIRMAN

December 2008