

Report from the Police and Crime Panel Working Group

22 January 2016

Police and Crime Plan Working Group – Final Report

Report by the Chairman of the Working Group

Summary

This report is intended to inform scrutiny of proposed amendments to the Police and Crime Plan presented under agenda item 6, and the proposed policing precept for 2016/17, presented under agenda item 5b.

The Group made recommendations related to the Plan and proposed precept, which the Panel is asked to consider.

Recommendations

The Plan

1. That the incoming Commissioner involves the Group as the performance measures for the new Plan's objectives are developed, to help ensure these are valid, reliable, and not in conflict with one another.

Proposed Precept

2. That the Commissioner continues to work with Sussex Police to explain to residents the evidence underlying the challenge of maintaining a visible policing presence throughout Sussex, given the changing nature of crime in the UK.
3. That the Commissioner encourages the concept of local communities funding their own community warden, where residents consider there to be a need.

1. Background and Methodology

- 1.1 This Working Group (WG) was established by Sussex Police and Crime Panel (PCP) at its meeting of 28 June 2013, to act as critical friend to the development of the Police and Crime Plan 2014/17, and report its findings back to the Panel. At the January 2014 meeting, it was agreed that the Group would meet at the appropriate point during each year's cycle (while always reporting back to the January Panel meeting), and that the Group's terms of reference would expand to include consideration of budget and precept development.
- 1.2 During the preparation cycle for 2016/17 the Group met twice, on 28 September and 21 December 2015. The Group heard evidence from the Commissioner's Chief Executive and Chief Finance Officer.

1.3 The Panel has a statutory duty to:

- Review and make a report or recommendations on the draft Plan, or variation, to the Commissioner.
- Review the proposed precept and make a report to the Commissioner on the proposed precept. The report may include recommendations.

The Group acted as a critical friend to the Commissioner as a variation to the Plan was drafted and the medium term financial forecast was developed. The Group's recommendations are intended to inform the Panel's statutory scrutiny of the proposed Plan variation, and the proposed policing precept, at its formal meeting on 22 January 2016.

2. Discussion and Recommendations

2.1 The Group agreed that a light-touch "refresh" of the Plan was appropriate, given that the Commissioner elected on 5 May 2016 would have to publish a new Plan as soon as practicable, but, in any case, within the 2016/17 financial year. The Group made syntax and stylistic comments on the draft amended Plan, which the Commissioner's officers will have addressed in the draft formally presented to the Panel.

2.1.1 The Group identified some generic issues and themes which the incoming Commissioner should consider while drafting the new Plan.

Plan - Performance and Measures

2.2 The Group identified an inherent tension between the Crime and Community Safety measure (reduce the number of recorded crimes 1,000 population) and the Public Confidence measure (Increase the reporting of domestic abuse, serious sexual offences anti-social behaviour and hate crime) – success in achieving the latter had caused the failure to achieve the former.

2.3 There should be signposting in the report to direct people to detailed performance information relating to the objectives in the Plan, and to allow this information to be regularly updated, without requiring an update to the Plan.

2.4 The performance measures intended to demonstrate achievement of the Plan's objectives had been an ongoing source of concern for the Group, and the wider Panel. The Group accepted that the current Plan (including the measures) had been published very quickly after the Commissioner's election in November 2012, in order to meet the statutory deadline. However, it was noted that the incoming Commissioner elected in May 2016 would have until spring 2017 to publish their Plan.

Recommendation 1

That the incoming Commissioner involves the Group as the performance measures for the new Plan's objectives are developed, to help ensure these are valid, reliable, and not in conflict with one another.

Precept

- 2.5 The second meeting of the Working Group was held following the announcement on 17 December of the capping arrangements for policing precepts, together with final details of the Grant Settlement.
- 2.6 Under the Police Grant Settlement for 2016/17, no force will face a cash reduction so long as their precept is maximised (capped at a £5 increase for the ten lowest precept force areas, of which Sussex is one). This had come as a significant relief, as a 40% funding reduction had been one of the scenarios modelled by Sussex Police and the Commissioner's officers.
- 2.7 The Group considered that, in the light of this relatively improved financial picture (with a lower attendant savings target), the public might struggle to understand why their visible/community policing presence was still set to be scaled back, with funding instead being directed towards areas having no community presence.

Recommendation 2

That the Commissioner continues to work with Sussex Police to explain to residents the evidence underlying the challenge of maintaining a visible policing presence throughout Sussex, given the changing nature of crime in the UK.

- 2.8 Where communities felt that a local visible presence was a particular priority for their area, the Group felt more needed could be done to encourage communities to employ community wardens, a practice which had been widely praised but so far only patchily adopted across Sussex.

Recommendation 3

That the Commissioner encourages the concept of local communities funding their own community warden, where residents consider there to be a need.

- 2.9 The Group did not have the opportunity to discuss the Commissioner's proposed precept, since the Grant Settlement had only just been announced by the time of its second meeting, and the Commissioner's public consultation had in any case not yet closed. There was, however, discussion of the precept options presented to residents as part of the Commissioner's consultation (which was launched prior to the Grant Settlement announcement).
- 2.10 Having learned about the financial pressures Sussex Police still faces (despite the better-than-expected Grant Settlement), the Group emphasised the importance of the Commissioner clearly setting out the priority areas on which any funding raised through an increased precept would be spent, and hoped that any funding so raised would not be used to mitigate savings targets.

3. Working Group Resource Implications and Value for Money

- 3.1 The cost associated with the Working Group has been met from within the funding received by Sussex Police and Crime Panel from the Home Office.

4. Risk Management Implications

- 4.1 Scrutinising the Annual Police and Crime Plan and its variations, and reviewing the proposed policing precept are core aspects of the Panel's role. A failure to adequately undertake these duties risks breaching the applicable sections of the Police Reform and Social Responsibility Act 2011.

5. Other Considerations – Equality – Crime Reduction – Human Rights

- 5.1 The Police and Crime Plan sets out the strategic direction for policing in Sussex. As such, there are clear implications for local authorities' duty to avoid or to reduce crime or anti-social behaviour, or to assist partners to do so.
- 5.2 There are no implications which compromise human rights. The recommendations treat all members of the community equally.

TFG membership

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