

Panel challenges police performance

POLICE performance on stop and searches, rural policing and rape convictions were challenged at the final meeting of the Sussex Police and Crime Panel ahead of May's elections.

The Police and Crime Commissioner faced questions at the meeting on Friday, March 12, where she also presented an update on her office's involvement in dealing with low level police complaints.

Response to a public question around the increased likelihood of a member of the BAME community being stopped and searched by Sussex Police, raised concerns about the process among Panel members.

Commissioner Katy Bourne said the force takes proportionality around stop and search very seriously, with officers being fully and regularly trained to ensure the power was being used properly. She said the use of stop and search was monitored by the force itself and by her own office.

Mrs Bourne was also quizzed about the number of convictions for rape and sexual offences compared to the increasing number of reported rapes.

She said that rape investigations were very complicated and in around 50 per cent of cases, the victim did not want a criminal justice outcome for a number of reasons.

She added: "We are working hard with CPS to improve the actual quality of case files. Our conviction on rapes and sexual offences is 94 per cent, so 94 percent of cases that get through to court get a conviction. That's 16 per cent above national average and 40 per cent better than 2017/18 when started challenging ourselves on this."

Questions about the Commissioner's confidence in the intelligence sharing links between the rural policing team and rural communities, and investment in domestic abuse initiatives were also asked by the Panel. The Commissioner was further quizzed on the number of Sussex Police officers subject to misconduct proceedings.

An update was given to members on the national police complaints reform and the changes to the way complaints were handled which came into effect a year ago.

Presented with three models, the Commissioner explained to the Panel why she had chosen to adopt one which sees the force continue to be responsible for handling complaints, but with her office undertaking a review when the outcomes of lower level complaints are appealed.

"I was clear from day one that this model was absolutely the right way to go," she told the Panel. "The concern was that forces weren't learning, and that was a big part of why I wanted to stick with model one because any organisation will only improve if it learns from its mistakes."

The Commissioner said the best evidence that the model is working is officers don't continue to make the same mistakes.

Thanks were given at the end of the meeting to outgoing chairman Cllr Bill Bentley who will not return to the Panel after May's elections, and independent Panel member Peter Nightingale, whose five-year term has come to an end

The next meeting of the Sussex Police and Crime Panel takes place on Friday, June 25, 2021.

Ends