



Sussex Police and Crime Panel – Public and Panel Questions to the Commissioner

24 September 2021

Report by the Clerk to the Police and Crime Panel

Below is a schedule of the questions received prior to this meeting and where possible responses have been included. Responses will be tabled at the meeting that were not available at the time of despatch. Written questions must be received two weeks before a meeting of the Panel and the Commissioner or Panel Chairman is invited to provide a response by noon of the day before the meeting.

Questions relating to operational matters of Sussex Police are passed to a relevant officer at Sussex Police for a response, with a brief summary of such questions provided below. For the current meeting, one question has been received for a response by the Commissioner.

1. Written question from Ms Grier of Brighton & Hove.

Question:

Can the Commissioner advise if she is content with Sussex Police's plans to tackle the perpetrators of child criminal exploitation in Sussex, and particularly Brighton & Hove? Specifically, what plans do they have to work with secondary schools and sixth form colleges to raise awareness of the risks and impact of drugs and drug dealing? I feel these efforts need to be renewed as weed in particular is now 'normal' for teens. Thank you.

Answer:

Thank you for your questions. I recognise the importance of responding robustly to tackle the perpetrators of criminal exploitation and having effective plans in place to raise awareness of the risks and impact of substance misuse in schools and colleges throughout Sussex.

I would like to start by reassuring you that each of these areas is covered within my Police & Crime Plan 2021/24 under 'Public Priority 3 – Support victims and safeguard the vulnerable'. The Plan can be viewed through the following link:
www.sussex-pcc.gov.uk/media/5768/sussex-police-crime-plan-2021-24-web.pdf

Exploitation

Sussex Police take exploitation extremely seriously and have a dedicated Detective Superintendent responsible for tackling substance misuse and county lines drug dealing throughout the county.

It is recognised that children and young people have spent a greater amount of time at home and behind closed doors in the last 18 months – as a direct result of the COVID-19 pandemic – which has increased the risk of exploitation.

Cuckooing is a term used to describe the action of organised crime groups, gangs or other drug dealers taking over the property of a vulnerable adult with the sole purpose of using it as a local base to supply drugs from.

The Sussex Police operational response to this is called 'Operation Cuckoo' and involves Neighbourhood Policing Teams undertaking regular visits to properties which have been cuckooed to disrupt the organised nature of the crime and to safeguard the vulnerable adults within the properties.

This process involves collaborative work with a wide range of partner agencies including housing providers, support services [such as mental health, substance misuse, social care and/or probation] to reduce the risk of cuckooing happening again. I would like to reassure you that Sussex Police and the local authorities in Sussex use the full range of tools and powers afforded to them through the Anti-Social Behaviour, Crime and Policing Act 2014 to disrupt and deter criminal activity in this area.

Safeguarding

There is a joint responsibility to safeguard children and young people and my office and Sussex Police work closely with local authorities to maximise the effectiveness of the response provided in Sussex. There is a range of strategic and operational multi-agency working structures in place to deliver this collaborative response, including Partnership Tactical Tasking Coordination Groups and police officers working directly with Youth Offending Services [within local authorities].

Sussex Police also have dedicated Prevention Youth Officers who are the specific point of contact for schools and other educational establishments throughout Sussex. These officers work closely with multi-agency safeguarding and vulnerability teams to tackle any identified problems and sustain a more consistent and joined-up approach around information sharing and problem solving.

Prevention, education and diversionary activities are paramount to reducing the number of drug-related crimes and offences in Sussex and there are already many initiatives in place throughout the county to work with children and young people through schools, colleges and other educational establishments to build confidence in policing and promote positive behaviours.

Sussex Police work collaboratively to support the 12 Community Safety Partnerships in Sussex to tackle and reduce crime at a district level, including substance misuse. The Force and local authorities in Sussex have also joined forces with the National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children to promote safeguarding children awareness training for individuals who regularly enter homes as part of their work, including gas engineers, local authority employees and taxi drivers, to encourage them to report anything that they may see or encounter.

It is recognised that some of the risk and harm posed to children and young people comes from outside of the family home. This is known as 'extra-familial harm' and means that despite the best efforts of parents and families to keep their children and young people safe there are 'contexts' outside of the family home which may still put them at risk. This can include gatherings at specific locations in local communities, online contact and social media platforms and pressure from peers in educational settings.

As a result of this, Sussex Police and the local authorities work together to raise awareness of the contextual safeguarding approaches with individuals within their workforces who are most likely to engage with and support children and young people. This includes considerations around areas known to be high-harm 'hotspots' [such as accessible public spaces] and peer groups [with children and young people who are known to be at risk of exploitation]. Work is also ongoing with a range of partners to use resources to improve safety in these high-harm hotspots and to provide suitable interventions to those peer groups who may be at a greater risk.

Contextual safeguarding also acknowledges that traditional child protection processes tend to focus on risk and harm within the family home and, as such, further child protection processes need to be considered from an extra-familial harm perspective to ensure that the parents and families who are doing their best to support their children and keep them safe are not unduly alienated.

Diversions activities

In recent years, I have invested in REBOOT – an Early Intervention Youth Programme – which aims to divert away from crime children and young people at risk of becoming involved in serious violence, including those involved with substance misuse.

REBOOT was launched in April 2019, following a successful bid to the Home Office Early Intervention Fund, and is a five-stage supportive, behavioural intervention model with escalating stages should any of the young people continue to find themselves 'at risk'. The programme engages positively with those aged between 10-17 years of age who are at risk of committing serious violence, and those who have already come to the attention of the police through anti-social behaviour, low-level criminality and substance misuse.

During 2020/21, REBOOT received 711 referrals, of which 421 young people (59%) were accepted onto the programme and progressed through the five stages. Following a successful two years, REBOOT has now transitioned to Sussex Police to lead and manage moving forward.

During 2019/20, Sussex was also one of 18 police force areas to secure funding from the Home Office to create a Violence Reduction Partnership (VRP) to bring together specialists from police, local government, health, probation services and community organisations to tackle serious violence and the underlying causes of violent crime.

I understand the importance of delivering a collective response with partners to tackle serious violence in Sussex and to provide interventions which help reduce the risk and impact of this crime.

I also recognise the differences that exist between each of the three distinct areas of Sussex [Brighton & Hove, East Sussex and West Sussex] and the additional challenges that this presents. As a result, separate Violence Reduction Partnerships have been created for each area with each seeking to build and develop the strong multi-agency partnerships, networks and relationships that existed throughout Sussex.

It is recognised that serious violent crime is often linked to exploitation and organised crime, including substance misuse and county lines drug dealing. The VRPs have sought to deliver detached youth work sessions across the county [led by The Trust for Developing Communities and other youth service providers] and to provide bespoke interventions with partner agencies, including the National Probation Service, to engage with young people in the spaces they are using – such as parks and open spaces – and to divert them into other positive activities available locally e.g. music and sport.

A total of 538 young people were reached through the interventions funded by the VRP in Sussex during the first quarter of 2021. This included 324 young people in Brighton & Hove, 57 in East Sussex and 157 in West Sussex.

School interventions

The Force works with local authorities to provide support to whole school communities as well as undertaking targeted work with specific groups of young people identified to be most at risk. These sessions have included specific themes around keeping safe and identifying the signs of exploitation within friendship groups. The education teams within each of the local authorities work closely with designated safeguarding and personal social health education (PSHE) leads in schools to develop sessions around anti-bullying, inclusion, diversity and social issues that may affect young people.

Sussex Police officers will also be delivering classroom-based sessions around drug misuse for secondary schools and sixth form colleges during 2021/22. The objective of these sessions is for students to learn about the legal and personal consequences of using illegal drugs, including the following areas:

- What possession, supply and intent to supply is in relation to drugs.
- The short- and long-term legal consequences of being found in possession of, using, selling or supplying different drugs.
- The role of the police in enforcing the law on drugs.

The Force is also offering further sessions around:

- Managing the risk of exploitation and staying safe – for students to explore the distinction between healthy relationships and those that exhibit unhealthy characteristics which may signify they are being exploited.
- Knife crime – for students to look at the issues around carrying a knife, know the law, understand the consequences and the impact relating to carrying a knife.
- Online hate crime – for students to understand what is meant by online hate and develop strategies for responding to online hate, including reporting it.
- Relationship safety – for students to recognise inappropriate behaviour, understand the consequences and impact of harmful sexual behaviour and how to seek support if needed.
- Violence prevention – for students to explore the law in relation to violent behaviour and the role of the police in ensuring community safety.

As you can see from the above, there is a range of diversionary activities and interventions in place in Sussex to safeguard children and young people and to protect them from the harm and risk of exploitation and substance misuse. I hope the above provides you with some reassurance about the ongoing work of the police, local authorities, statutory partners and other agencies to provide an effective response to each of these areas throughout Sussex.