

Annual report scrutinised by Police and Crime Panel

A DIFFICULT year of policing through a pandemic was put under spotlight by the Sussex Police and Crime Panel.

At its first face-to-face meeting since Covid restrictions were introduced last year, the Panel received the Police and Crime Commissioner's final annual report, elected a new chairman and vice chairman and appointed members to its budget and precept working group.

Katy Bourne, who was returned as Commissioner in May's elections, introduced her report with thanks and praise for Sussex Police officers and staff who had worked throughout the pandemic.

She highlighted the successes of the year April 2020 to March 2021, including increased enforcement, investigation and more visible policing in towns and village, as well as online.

Mrs Bourne said she was pleased with significant improvements made to 101 waiting times during the year, with average waiting times falling from 14 to 15 minutes to six minutes and continuing to fall. She also highlighted the success of the rural policing team, now one of the biggest in the south east.

Figures showing increased recruitment raised questions from the Panel about whether staffing levels were back to 2012 levels, but the Commissioner asked them to focus on productivity rather than numbers.

She said: "We are definitely on target for recruitment. The year we are looking at we are recruiting 129 officers and that was the target.

"I think what we need to look at now is the officers we have, how are we utilising them? Are they being as effective as they can be? I don't think it's terribly helpful to look back ten years ago, let's look forward."

The Commissioner agreed to provide comparative officer numbers from when she took office in 2012.

Questions were asked about diversity and whether crime and victim figures could be broken down to ethnic backgrounds to illustrate where support services should be targeted.

Members also asked about the policy for spending money from the Proceeds of Crime Act and the Commissioner agreed to give a presentation to members about this at a future meeting.

Concerns were also raised about an increase spend on the Commissioners office, but Mrs Bourne pointed out the cost of running her office was 0.45 per cent of the entire Sussex Police budget.

She said: "I think it's good value for money, when you look at the annual report and you see the breadth of the work that my office undertakes and the way that I am able to bring extra funding in to Sussex Police as well."

Speaking after the meeting, newly elected chairman Cllr Christian Mitchell said: "The meeting gave us a good opportunity to scrutinise the Commissioner's annual report and really dig into the detail of how taxpayers' money is being used.

"It has been an extremely difficult year, particularly for those in the emergency services, and it was good to see the results of all their hard work."

ISSUED ON BEHALF OF THE SUSSEX POLICE AND CRIME PANEL

During the meeting, Cllr Bob Standley was appointed Vice-Chair.

The next meeting of the Sussex Police and Crime Panel will take place on Friday, September 24, 2021.

For more information about the work of the Sussex Police and Crime Panel, visit

<https://sussexpcp.gov.uk/>

Ends