

Stop and search data scrutinised by Panel

THE IMPACT of stop and search powers on different communities across Sussex was subject to scrutiny from the Sussex Police and Crime Panel.

Sussex Police and Crime Commissioner, Katy Bourne, presented a report to Panel members which set out how the powers were being used by Sussex Police and how she held the Chief Constable to account on this.

Panel members heard that between August 2020 and July 2021 Sussex Police carried out 7,509 stop and searches, 15 per cent fewer than the same period in 2019/20 due to Covid restrictions and lockdowns.

While members were pleased to hear that more than 70 per cent of stop and searches resulted in a police outcome, there was concern that individuals who identified as black, Asian and minority ethnic were 2.8 times more likely to be stopped in Sussex than those who identified as white, while those identifying themselves as black were 10.2 times more likely to be stopped.

The report identified the various boards and panels set up to ensure transparency and checks on the proportionality of stop and searches.

Concerns were raised by the panel that there was still disproportionality in the data and members asked that the Commissioner provide figure for comparable police forces to allow them to better understand Sussex Police's performance and data broken down by districts and boroughs to give a better idea of issues in local area.

Following mention of the 1999 McPherson report, which looked at the police's response to the racially motivated murder of Stephen Lawrence, Mrs Bourne spoke of the importance of officers understanding the reason for concerns about disproportionality.

She said: "With the vast recruitment of officers going on at the moment and with a large majority of officers being fairly young, it's really important that they understand the history of race-relations and how that history has come about with policing. It is important that is incorporated as part of the training otherwise you lose that understanding."

Months after publishing her Police and Crime Plan, Mrs Bourne updated the Panel on the work being done to support victims and safeguard the vulnerable – one of three 'public priorities' set out in document.

Panel members heard how services were being strengthened and progress made in detecting, preventing and supporting the victims of domestic abuse, rape and serious sexual offences, stalking and harassment and elder abuse.

Welcoming the efforts being made, the Panel highlighted the need for greater certainty over long-term funding to ensure the work could continue and suggested this was an area the Commissioner could lobby the Government on.

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Speaking after the meeting, chairman Cllr Christian Mitchell said: “These meetings give us an opportunity to cover a variety of topics, and this was no different with issues ranging from the use of electric scooters to victim support services to stop and search data.

“The issue of how stop and searches are conducted is an extremely important one, which was reflected in the in-depth debate. We appreciate the Commissioner’s efforts to give us context to the figures and agree to provide the additional information requested to help Panel members properly understand how their communities are affected.”

The next meeting of the Sussex Police and Crime Panel will take place on Friday, January 28, when the Sussex Police precept will be discussed.

Ends.