

### Sussex Police, a force to contend with – Leader Update 13

Some questions for you; who remembers the ‘bobby on the beat’ in his or her helmeted uniform, quietly patrolling a prescribed patch and talking to the local folk? Or the Panda cars with their blue and white livery and some with a rotating blue beacon on the roof? Those were the days when crime was relatively slow moving; a time when a policeman could cycle to an incident or drive his Morris 1000 (or other types) across the town with blue light flashing.



50 years on and crime now moves at lightning speed and covers many new areas, such as online fraud (scams), hate crime, anti-social behaviour, online harassment and bullying, drugs and ‘county lines’ drug trafficking. The list goes on. To counter this, our police forces have to be fast-moving, relying heavily on intelligence from public, social media, covert sources, surveillance cameras and undercover officers.

I was privileged recently to be invited to a meeting, on 31st October, with Jo Shiner, Chief Constable of Sussex Police, as part of a representation of the three Mid Sussex towns (Burgess Hill, East Grinstead and Haywards Heath). This was an invaluable opportunity to gain insight into the work carried out by our local police force, which highlighted the fact that Mid Sussex is a ‘low crime’ area compared to others.

Rosie Ross, the Chief Superintendent, presented the latest software developments for monitoring call centre performance, which has led to significant improvements in response times. Rosie also showed the meeting how GPS tracking can pinpoint the location of each officer, enabling rapid deployments in the event of an incident. It was noted that the main ‘clusters’ of officers on that day were in Brighton and along the coastal parts of the county.

Some of facts I have gleaned since that meeting at the Lewes HQ are of concern. Whilst a large part of the reported crimes in Sussex are ‘less visible’, more than 16% of them are against women and girls. Mental health issues continue to grow in the community and this takes up a lot of police time, particularly with the high suicide rate at Beachy Head. This suggests serious shortcomings in our Social and Mental Health Services when police have to be diverted from their core duties to attend such incidents.



As for Burgess Hill, we still have a rather tatty-looking police station, though not manned in the same way as years ago. It is a base for specialist teams, the detail of which I am unable to disclose but it is open to the public at certain times of the week:

Monday, Wednesday and Friday from 10.00am to 2.00pm.

As at 1st October 2024, the Sussex Police staff numbers were:

3,363 Officers 81 Special constables

2,179 Staff 231 Volunteers

590 Detectives 76 Cadets

257 PCSO's (Police Community Support Officers)

Going forward, our police force has considerably improved its efficiency and now answers 90% of 999 calls in 10 seconds and 101 calls in 2-3 minutes. As part of its training programme, cadets will spend some time on neighbourhood policing, gaining experience in dealing with the public face-to-face. It is a fact that Sussex Police is the 7th worst funded police force in the country and yet, with strong leadership, they are working hard to maintain Mid Sussex as a 'low crime' area. Long may it continue.

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