

# PARISH OF BILLINGSHURST

## MINUTES OF THE ANNUAL PARISH MEETING OF ELECTORS BILLINGSHURST CENTRE WEDNESDAY 6 MARCH 2024, 7.00PM

### Present:

Cllr K Peters, Chairman of the Parish Council

G C Burt, Clerk to the Council

Mrs E Berry, Office Manager, BPC

24 Members of the public, incl. 2 PCSOs and 9 Parish Councillors.

1. The Chairman welcomed all those present, explaining that the meeting was being streamed live to the internet and refreshments were available to the rear of the room. Mobile phones should be turned off or silenced.
2. **Presentation by the Police and Crime Commissioner (PCC) for Sussex, Katy Bourne, OBE.**

Katy Bourne (KB) said that she was now in her 12<sup>th</sup> year as PCC. She wasn't sure of any implications from today's budget for policing but there had been promises that there would be no cuts to police funding.

There were more police officers and PCSOs than there were 12 years ago. Performance and visibility were on the up. The number of PCSOs in the county had not been reduced; they were the visible face of policing; whilst not *warranted*, they had the power of persuasion through voice. Sussex Police had just under 300 PCSO (one force had scrapped them) and more police than since 2018. In the last year, compared to 2019, total neighbourhood crime was down by more than 23%, compared to 19% nationally.

The biggest volume of complaints is about the time spent trying to get through on 101 which had been 20 mins on average. This had resulted in an abandonment rate of 60%. KB was delighted that 101 performance had improved to a new 48 seconds wait to be answered making Sussex Police top in the country. This was also true of 999 calls which have to be answered within 10 seconds. Much of this was down to significant investment in control centres which was paying dividends. A new Microsoft platform, Power BI, meant police officers can log on and get info more easily.

In respect of what the Sarah Everard case had meant for Sussex Police, *ripples spread wide*, denting confidence in policing. The Chief Constable (CC) won't tolerate such low standards. All 6,100 staff, police and civilian staff had been re-vetted with only 2 showing slight anomalies which were not of concern.

One of KB's statutory duties was to write a Policing & Crime Plan, reflecting priorities dictated by the public. The CC has to deliver in regard to those priorities. The PCC can appoint and fire the CC.

When KB first started, the police budget was £250 million; it is now £295 million. The amount that the government gave police varied across the country, which she felt was unfair. Budgets continued to be tight. There was a high expectation of the police: 2,100 contacts were made per day, of which 900 were calls to 999 and 900 were calls to 101. The remaining contacts were made via e-mail and website forms. Of all those, 350 related to crimes. Many related to mental health issues. 28 people per day in Sussex were reported missing. In 2012 there were 2-3 reports of a serious sexual offence per day; in 2023 it is now 6 per day. Given these are often very complicated issues, it is easy to see how caseloads quickly build up and cases get drawn out. Online crimes, such as scams,

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are part of an increase to 50% of crime occurring online - much of it originating from abroad. This means that a typical officer divides their time equally between a physical beat and an e-beat.

Cllr Ken Peters said he had seen that Horsham Police had recently been asking online where they should be policing? Was it good to tell criminals where you would be?

KB responded that so called *Hotspot* policing proved to be effective; crime was shown to have reduced by up to 40% if police visit an area for 15 mins each day. A new police hub had just opened in Hastings town centre showing a very visible presence. Here the priority had been shoplifting, where every fortnight, police would target the most prolific offender. KB said that she was the lead PCC on business crime.

Cllr Steve Thomas asked what statistics she had available for the parish? She had none to hand.

KB said she would like to return to the position of seeing PCSOs attend more council meetings.

A resident said they were afraid to walk in Billingshurst at night. KB said she would need to better understand the individual situation. She understood that might be a likely feeling in the bigger coastal towns.

KB said people join the police to make a difference.

Stuart Sexton reported on the numerous incidents of BB guns being fired at club premises such as the scout hut. Policing in the area does not reflect the town-type issues we suffer from.

PCSO Joey said this was happening in other areas too and was part of an ongoing investigation. The damage being caused was believed to be slingshots which are illegal to use but not illegal to carry. CCTV evidence to date was not clear enough to take action against individuals; many parents of youths were not willing to engage with the police.

A resident likened the bypass to a racetrack with excessive speeds and *donuts* on roundabouts. KB said if re-elected, she would like a new team dedicated to just noisy and speeding vehicles.

A resident said work was needed to reduce the speed on the A29 and Bury Hill in particular. KB said she was somewhat disenchanted with the Sussex Safer Road Partnership, which she would like to change.

Cllr Doug Waller asked why we can't have average speed cameras like on the A24 at Box Hill? KB said she wanted fine proceeds to be spent in the areas affected and in accordance with residents' wishes.

Cllr Caroline Beresford Pratt asked about vehicle crime in the parish. It was reported that as per earlier answer, CCTV imagery was of insufficient quality. PCSO Tom Fonteyn said someone had been apprehended for vehicle crime.

Two questions sent in by e-mail were read out:

a) From Miss Kingston:

*Once again, I note the police are to receive a substantial uplift per the % figures. For all the years they've achieved this, I've seen no improvement in police attendance (or even action for such as thefts). TBH, I'm slightly XXXX off paying for what, I assume, is their increased attendance in such as Brighton. Billingshurst receives, IMO very little from Sussex Police. Might you, on my behalf, ask exactly why this is as we all get charged but not many receive any benefit.*

KB responded that places such as Brighton (& Hove) with a population approaching 250k were bound to see more policing, but this was not to the detriment of places such as Billingshurst. In addition, she was not allowed to raise the police precept by more than a set amount; if she wanted to ask for more, then a referendum would need to be held, the costs of which would cancel out any increase. The increase this coming year was, as usual, for more officers.

b) From Miss Booth

*Has Sussex Police been asked to deploy officers to assist the Metropolitan Police in policing the current demonstrations taking place each weekend in London? If they are helping, what is the impact of the overtime budget likely to be on policing in the County? Do residents bear the cost or does the Met?*

KB advised that the Met bears all costs but there is an agreement between all police forces to lend each other manpower as needs dictate (mutual aid).

*Short adjournment.*

**3. Approval of the Minutes of the Annual Parish Meeting on 12 April 2023.**

The draft minutes, having been circulated previously, were taken as read and it was **RESOLVED** that they be accepted and signed as a true record.

**4. To Receive the Annual Report of the Parish Council.**

The Chairman of the Parish Council, Cllr K Peters, reported on the activities of the Council over the past year, attached.

**5. To Receive the Audited Accounts for the year ending 31<sup>st</sup> March 2023.**

The Clerk to the Council, G Burt, gave an overview of the Council's finances over the past year and looked to the year ahead, attached.

**6 Question and answer session with Electors.**

K Brown asked about progress on improving the path leading from Station Road Community Gardens (SRCG) to the Weald School. The Clerk advised that it was hoped to undertake this, as part of providing a new path across the rear of SRCG, for which 3 quotes had been received, one of which was *off the scale*. It should, however, be noted that there were ownership issues with a section of pathway leading from SRCG to Myrtle Lane and this would need to be resolved before the project could be looked at any further. There would be no point placing a path across Council land at SRCG if people were unable to use the footpath leading from SRCG to Myrtle Lane due to its poor condition.

Meeting finished at 8.27pm