

SETTING STRATEGIC DIRECTION

SUSSEX ASSOCIATIONS OF LOCAL COUNCILS (SALCS)

Background

Each administrative county in England has a county association to provide legal, financial and procedural advice to its town and parish councils. This advice and support is provided for East and West Sussex by the Sussex Associations of Local Councils (SALC). SALC also provides the secretariat and support for the Surrey County Association and the South East Regional County Associations Forum, and in that capacity they have a clear view of life in all eight counties across the region. In Sussex there are 250 local councils with around 2,300 councillors, each of whom has a very critical and protective view about the way their community is policed. In 2004 the issue of visibility of policing for parish councils was a prominent element of the agenda.

Amongst the Association there was a widespread negative opinion of Sussex Police and its effectiveness. In 2004, the Director of SALC, Mr Trevor Leggo, approached the Chief Executive and Chairman of Sussex Police Authority to air his concerns about the visibility of police within communities and the way that the police were interacting with town and parish councils. It was the view of local councils that the police were unwilling to engage at the very local level and where good practice existed, it was felt that this was fragile.

The Authority adding value

The Authority listened and arranged for the Chairman and Chief Executive of the Police Authority to meet with the then Chief Constable, Sir Ken Jones, where they raised the concerns on behalf of SALC. The Authority were firmly of the view that if neighbourhood policing were to be properly embedded within communities, which was the vision of the Authority and the Chief Constable, the resource of the parish council was to be seen as a key partner in achieving the ambitions of effective neighbourhood and community policing.

Outcome

As a direct result of this meeting, a protocol was drawn up between the Authority and local councils to define what councils might expect from the police and, in turn, what the police would expect from local councils. This has been in existence since the end of 2004 and was revised again in 2008. The Chief Executive of the Police Authority, Dr John Godfrey, was also invited to become the Chairman of the Quality Local Councils Assessment Panel for West Sussex.

The relationship between the Authority and SALC is now strong, reflected in the fact that the two Chairmen of the Sussex County Associations and the Executive Director of SALC are routinely invited to attend the Authority's annual meeting with the chief executives and leaders from around Sussex to discuss the Policing Plan, Budget and other strategic matters affecting the whole of the county. In effect, SALC is treated the same as the principal authorities whose chief executives and leaders see this meeting as an important part of the year. Additionally, twice a year the Chairmen of the Associations, the Chairmen of the

District Associations, the Chairman of the Society of Local Council Clerks and the Executive Director of SALC meet with the Chief Executive of the Authority and the Chief Constable to discuss matters affecting local councils. The items on the agenda can be of a strategic nature, or indeed matters at a local level that have not been resolved by the district commander. All local councils are notified of the next meeting and are invited to bring matters forward. The Executive Director of SALC notifies the Authority and Force in advance of the concerns to allow for solutions to be identified by the meeting. This arrangement provides all our communities with access to the Chief Constable and then reports back on actions taken. Also, the Executive Director of SALC is invited to take part in the briefing and selection sessions with candidates for Chief Constable, Deputy Chief Constable and Assistant Chief Constable, in the company of Chief Executives of East Sussex and West Sussex County Councils, Brighton & Hove City Council and the Crown Prosecution Service.

As a direct result of the Authority's intervention, which has been reinforced over a number of years with the initiatives outlined above, the perspective of the police by local councils has changed dramatically. The development of neighbourhood policing in Sussex has been successful, in no small part due to the strong partnership that now exists between parish councils and the local police with the appointment of a PCSO for every parish or ward re-establishing confidence and providing all settlements of the visible, uniformed police presence. This is complemented by the fact that local councils can now contribute to community safety initiatives, and there are examples where local councils pay for additional PCSO support.

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