



Four years ago, Bristol was busy voting in the well-known, charismatic Mayor George Ferguson, however, also on the ballot paper that day was a chance to elect a brand new Police and Crime Commissioner.

One of the names next to the box for Avon and Somerset's Police and Crime Commissioner (PCC) was that of Sue Mountstevens – previously known for her family's famous Bristol bakery and a regular on the judge's bench at Bristol Magistrates Court, an Independent candidate, just like George.

Sue, was not then widely known for her passion and interest in the police justice system, but few who now know her for her work as PCC cannot doubt her track record, especially when it comes to improving access to justice and victim support in the community.

Behind the CRIME scene

by Georgia Gillespie

Bristol born and bred, Sue has always been interested in the police justice system. She starts by explaining there was nothing specific in her childhood that made her want to go into social justice. She said: "But my children joke that I have a CV that has been perfectly written for a Police Crime Commissioner, even though no one knew they'd ever exist."

She has a fair point. According to a survey carried out by this newspaper: 19 of 75 respondents have never heard of Police Crime Commissioners; 42 don't know what a PCC is; and circa 70% don't know what they do. She said: "I feel privileged to have my position, being a middle class white women, and I think

that I have successfully opened up the police and let the residents see what's going on."

The eldest child of three, she started from when she finished her studies of Social Science at Bristol Polytechnic. She said: "I then worked at the family bakery to earn money before my father told me that I wasn't going to keep the job just because I was the boss's daughter. I continued to work in the bakery business for 25 years."

The family bakery business, of which Sue was the fifth generation owner, has recently been sold for personal reasons and has plans to become a franchise.

Sue was a magistrate for 15 years and was her first job in the justice system, when I asked about why she became a magistrate. She explained: "I had a stereotypical judgment that magistrates were maybe too old, maybe they had a certain political view, and I'm not a political animal in any way as an independent Police Crime Commissioner I don't think politics has anything to do with policing as I don't think politics should have anything to do with magistracy. But I very much wanted to be part of a system that actually deals fairly."

The self-proclaimed feminist and advocate of equality has tried to make sure everyone's voices of whatever background, gender or race is properly represented. Sue said: "I'm proud that I'm the first female PCC and I think that in some cases women are better than men at certain negotiations. I am very proud to be a feminist but for me feminism means equality."

Being the first elected PCC who ran against three men in the 2012 election, she said: "I've never faced any closed doors because I am a woman and I have never felt that my views were not taken on board, even though the police service is regarded quite macho."

She explains how she feels that being a magistrate and being a PCC, it's very important that people understand how decisions have been made. "When I have been faced with making tough decisions in my career, such as owning a business and making someone redundant, which was incredibly, personally, very, very difficult for me but you've always got to look at the greater good."

Sue has encountered some challenges in her career as there was some controversy in the media back in 2014 involving Chief Constable Nick Gargan, the independent PCC fully believes that honesty is the best policy.

Sue said: "I want to be open and transparent, I have nothing to hide. People need to understand my only agenda is to deliver a very effective and efficient police service in order to serve the residents of Avon and Somerset." She faced her challenges head on and seems to have a clear conscience: "Was I tempted sometimes to go and do a deal behind closed doors? I don't think I was but it could have been an option."

As to how effective she has been in her position, she said: "I'm only as good as the information people give me." She prides herself of spending one day a week out in the community as well as holding public forums every two months so that residents can talk to the big dogs in the police. This has been the first ever term of Police Crime Commissioners, which is coming to an end in the next few months.

The turnout for the last PCC elections were extremely low. She said: "Do I think there's going to be a better turn out next time? I don't think so. I think because we live in areas of very low crime I don't think people are that interested." From the survey of 75 respondents, 38 were not aware that there was an election in 2012, only 28% of respondents voted and 80% don't know when the next election is.

Despite this Sue's energy and commitment to the role means she will be giving it her all to get the message out there as she is running for re-election on May 5th – the same day that Bristol will be re-electing its Mayor once more.

She said: "While the role of the PCC may not be seen as important as the Mayoral elections I am determined to continue the job I started and do it in a way that does not involve party politics."

Sue has clearly never been someone that can be restricted or categorised with a clear strength of will. "I've always been passionate," she said. "You could never put me into a pigeon hole." Having gone from working in a bakery to a magistrate, to owning a business to becoming the first elected PCC for Avon and Somerset, I think she might be right.



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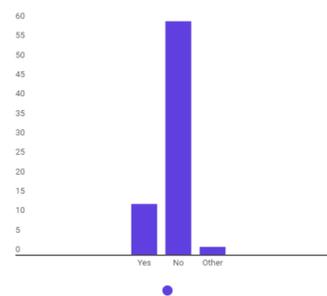
Do you know what a Police Crime Commissioner is?



Do you know what a Police Crime Commissioner does?

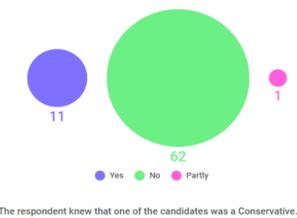


Do you know when the next election for Police Crime Commissioners is?



One respondent thought it was in 2015, the other only knew because their voting card arrived in the post.

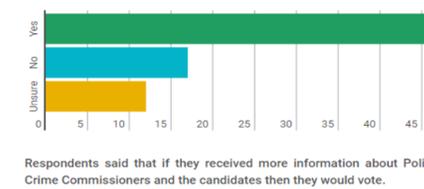
Do you know the candidates for your area?



The respondent knew that one of the candidates was a Conservative.

Word Count: 1042

Will you vote in the next election? (May 2016)



Respondents said that if they received more information about Police Crime Commissioners and the candidates then they would vote.

Do you think there should be more awareness and understanding of PCC's and what they do?

