

Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Minutes of a Meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee held in the Council Chamber, Civic Centre, Tannery Lane, Ashford on the **25th February 2014**.

Present:

Cllr. Adby (Chairman)

Cllrs. Apps, Bennett, Buchanan, Davison, Feacey, Mrs Hutchinson, Miss Martin, Mrs Martin, Mortimer, Smith, Yeo

In accordance with Procedural Rule 1.2 (iii) Councillor Buchanan attended as Substitute Member for Councillor Burgess.

Apologies:

Cllrs. Burgess, Chilton

Also Present:

Cllrs. Claughton and Shorter

Health, Parking & Community Safety Manager, Assistant Health, Parking and Community Safety Manager, Chief Inspector Mitchell Fox, Policy and Performance Officer, Senior Scrutiny Officer, Member Services & Scrutiny Support Officer

333 Declarations of Interest

Councillor	Interest	Minute No.
Feacey	Made a 'Voluntary Announcement' as he was on the Management Committee of UKLPG	336
Mortimer	Made a 'Voluntary Announcement' as he was a magistrate.	335
Shorter	Made a 'Voluntary Announcement' as he had been the victim of a burglary.	335

334 Minutes

Resolved:

That Recommendation (i) under Minute no 299 be amended to read 2014/15. That subject to this amendment the Minutes of the Meeting of this Committee held on the 28th January 2014 be approved and confirmed as a correct record.

335 Community Safety Partnership

The Health, Parking & Community Safety Manager and Community Safety Partnership Chairman elect said she had pleasure in introducing the Community Safety Partnership (CSP) report. She introduced Chief Inspector Mitchell Fox, the Vice-Chair elect of the CSP.

The Assistant Health, Parking & Community Safety Manager highlighted two particular CSP programmes of note. The first was the Pathways Course, which was run in association with Kent Fire and Rescue. This provided a structured course for 25 young unemployed people (1 day per week for 9 weeks) and involved physical instruction, lectures, first aid and health and safety training as well as support to get back into employment. Out of the 25 young people, 14 were now in full-time employment, 2 were in part-time employment and none of those attending the course had subsequently committed anti-social behaviour. The second programme of note was the Love Shouldn't Hurt programme. Domestic abuse across the Borough and the county were rising significantly, partly as a result of more people reporting abuse. A One Stop Shop, located at the Willow Centre, offered victims of domestic abuse a multi-agency advice centre, with free legal advice, housing and benefit advice and specialist domestic abuse services. The Centre was now the most visited centre of its type in the county, although it had only been running for 2 years. The CSP had commissioned the Love Shouldn't Hurt programme, which was rolled out into five secondary schools to educate young people on domestic abuse and acceptable behaviour in relationships.

The Health, Parking & Community Safety Manager reported that an annual workshop was held in January to consider the previous year's statistics and to set priorities for the next financial year. It had been agreed to retain the six priorities from the previous year, and to add rural crime as a priority. The March CSP meeting would be asked to approve these priorities for the coming year. Other workshops had also been held with partners to develop the CSP tactical delivery plans.

The Kent Police and Crime Commissioner, Ann Barnes, had visited the Borough in December and had been very complimentary about the work of the CSP. A breakdown of the spending against the CSP grant was provided at Appendix C of the report. The Health, Parking & Community Safety Manager concluded by thanking all members of the CSP for their work throughout the year.

The Portfolio Holder for Community and Wellbeing considered that this was a thorough and comprehensive report and the overall picture was encouraging. It was clear that the measures taken were having a positive effect, although there was no suggestion of complacency. He considered that there were areas of the Borough which still required further concentrated effort. He also noted the successful visit by the Kent Police and Crime Commissioner and her favourable comments. He highlighted the fact that rural crime had been added as a priority for the coming year, and acknowledged the work of all CSP members and Officers. He considered that the multi-agency approach resulted in crime being tackled and controlled for the benefit of the whole Borough.

In response to questions from the Committee, Chief Inspector Fox explained that interpreting the accuracy of the crime figures was a complex issue. There were

many calls received where it was difficult to establish whether a crime had actually taken place, although 90% of reported crimes were recorded as such. Kent Police were one of the best forces in the country and the crime rates had been decreasing in recent years. The Ashford force was the second best in performance terms in the county. Any slight increases in crime statistics were due to changes in the recording process, but HMIC were currently reviewing the crime recording system. Chief Inspector Fox stated that the Ashford force had achieved a 90% satisfaction rate for their crime investigation.

Chief Inspector Fox reported that while 17% of all crime in the Borough emanated from Victoria Ward, this was largely due to theft and shoplifting in the town centre. A new town centre team was to be set up to deal specifically with town centre crime. Drug figures were closely linked to the night time economy in the area and particular venues where drugs were found on people before they entered the venues. There were other drug incidents throughout Victoria Ward and an operation was currently underway to disrupt known drug networks.

The Chief Inspector explained that fraud figures were often complex to analyse because fraud crimes were allotted to the locality where the fraud originated, rather than where the victim was located. Because of internet fraud, crimes committed on Ashford residents were not usually included in Ashford's fraud statistics.

A Member of the Committee described a burglary incident which had recently taken place in Rolvenden and remarked that it had taken 45 minutes for the police to respond to the call for help. Chief Inspector Fox advised that rural crime had been included in next year's CSP priorities specifically to address this kind of issue. He admitted that there were difficulties at present for response units to get to rural locations quickly. There would be a Kent police restructure on 23rd June which would be of benefit to Ashford since more officers would be available 24/7 and local control of officers would enable them to reach rural areas faster. There would be a dedicated team working on rural burglaries, although arrests had already been made in Rolvenden.

With regard to a question on using CCTV for fly-tipping crime, the Assistant Health, Parking & Community Safety Manager explained that the CSP had 4 mobile cameras in use in the Borough, all of which were currently focussed on areas of anti-social behaviour. Relocation of a camera would cost approximately £600 and their use was restricted to overt surveillance, which might preclude their effectiveness for catching fly-tippers. He acknowledged that fly-tipping had increased over the last year, and advised that the CSP would be concentrating on alternative options for tackling this particular form of crime over the coming year. Partners would be working together to minimise impact and catch offenders. He concluded that the CSP could consider purchasing more cameras for filming this type of crime if it was considered an appropriate use of the budget. He also noted that the Council employed contractors to have fly-tipping cleared from public land, although it could be a time-consuming process.

The Assistant Health, Parking & Community Safety Manager advised that the town centre alcohol policy had now been running successfully for a year, and had been particularly useful in dealing with issues in the Memorial Gardens during the summer. The Chairman remarked that he had definitely noticed a difference in

Victoria Ward as a result of the alcohol policy. In response to a question on legal highs, the Assistant Health, Parking & Community Safety Manager explained that there was no current legislation against the sale of legal highs, so the CSP was unable to close down the shop which had recently opened in the town centre. The CSP were working across the country and county to put pressure on the Home Office to review the legislation on legal highs. The CSP were seeking to raise awareness by working with head teachers and schools, and by encouraging the shop itself to adopt the Challenge 21 policy. One Member commented that in the evenings he had noticed groups of people outside the shop behaving oddly. Chief Inspector Fox said that the new town centre team would pay particular attention to this kind of activity. He also advised Members to watch the media in the next couple of weeks in relation to criminal activity in Christchurch Road, to see the results of police work in that area.

A Member asked about the effectiveness of the pilot Community Panels (CPs), and Chief Inspector Fox responded that community resolutions were proving to be beneficial, but only in relation to certain types of crime in certain circumstances. CPs had seen some real successes so far, and first time offenders were shown to be less likely to reoffend, although there had to be buy-in on the part of the offender. CPs had saved the force a great deal of time by reducing reoffending rates. The Assistant Health, Parking & Community Safety Manager advised that there was a proposal to set up a Community Panel in Stanhope shortly.

Chief Inspector Fox advised that there was a difference in complexity between tackling urban and rural crime. Urban crime tended to be committed in a small area or neighbourhood whereas rural localities covered larger geographic areas which could be difficult to police. In the case of rural crime, the police tended to rely on help from the farming community and an intelligence-led approach.

In response to a Member's question, the Assistant Health, Parking & Community Safety Manager advised that graffiti removal kits were available from the Street Scene and Open Spaces Team.

A Member declared that he had been the victim of a burglary in a rural area. He advised that he had been satisfied with the very quick response to his call and the follow up service the next day. He noted the difficulties for police to get to rural areas quickly, and said this was particularly a problem where vulnerable people had been the victims of a crime. Chief Inspector Fox acknowledged that some rural areas took longer to reach than was ideal. He explained that the length of response time depended on the grade of the call, and to what extent it was an emergency. In reality an emergency call should not have a 45 minute response time. Improved supervision in the control room had been introduced to help prioritise emergency calls and to avoid other non-emergency calls slipping down the waiting list.

Chief Inspector Fox confirmed that in rural extremities officers could cross from one district boundary to another to respond to a call. He advised that a decision had recently been taken that the police would no longer have to attend the scene of all minor crimes (unless the victim was considered vulnerable). Details of lesser crimes could be reported over the phone, which would free up between 25 – 40% of police resources.

The Chief Inspector was asked about the impact of the new KCC street lighting project. He responded that it wasn't possible at present to make a direct association between lights being turned off at night and an increase in crime as it was too early to draw any conclusions.

The Health, Parking & Community Safety Manager advised that a report would be submitted to Cabinet in April suggesting that the remit of the Civil Enforcement Officers should be expanded to include generic enforcement work, possibly including litter, fly-tipping and dog fouling.

It was noted that a local PACT meeting had been going awry recently, with the local PCSO no longer attending. Chief Inspector Fox indicated that the police set a high priority on engagement with the community. He considered that the format of meetings was likely to change to embrace available technology, such as online meetings, which may lead to higher attendance rates. He undertook to investigate problems with local PACT meetings.

One Member remarked that the report was very comprehensive and raised important points. However, it contained so much information that he felt it should be dealt with in a different way. It was suggested that a sub-committee could be set up to consider the report in greater detail, or that the O&S Committee could consider each separate issue in detail at monthly meetings. After some discussion it was decided that this would create too much extra work for officers and for the Chief Inspector. The Health, Parking & Community Safety Manager reminded Members that they would be welcome to attend any quarterly CSP meeting and raise questions or ask for further information. She suggested that she provide Members with additional advice on the various methods by which they could influence or input into the work of the CSP.

The Portfolio Holder for Community and Wellbeing urged Members to attend the CSP quarterly meetings and use the opportunity to make their voice heard. He specifically wished to highlight and record officially his appreciation of the amount and quality of the work undertaken by PCSOs.

Chief Inspector Fox concluded by saying that Ashford was an incredibly safe Borough. Violent crime was extremely low, as were burglary rates. Anti-social behaviour had reduced by nearly one third in the past year. He emphasised that the force no longer adopted a target-led culture, although he acknowledged that it was still essential to collect management statistics in order to focus and prioritise resources.

Resolved:

That

- (i) the Community Safety Partnership report be noted.**
- (ii) the Health, Parking & Community Safety Manager provide Members with advice on the various methods by which they could influence or input into the work of the CSP.**

336 Ashford Borough Council's Performance – Quarter 3, 2013/14

The Policy and Performance Officer introduced this report. He explained that the report aimed to provide Members and the public with a transparent overview on the performance of the Council during this quarter. The report included information on what the Cabinet had achieved through its decision-making processes, key performance data on frontline services, and consideration of the wider Borough picture which impacted on the Council's work. The report focused around 2013-2015 corporate priorities. The Policy and Performance Officer noted that strategic level performance remained strong, with proactive work being undertaken to prepare for welfare reform and addressing bed and breakfast and homelessness pressures. Economic growth and entrepreneurship were evidenced through the arrival of the new John Lewis store and PopUp Ashford, and recycling rates were greatly improved as a result of the new recycling scheme. However, there were still some pressures on front line services.

Members queried why there were 2 properties outstanding with no gas certificates. The Portfolio Holder for Resource Management and Control explained that 2 residents had refused to allow contractors or Council officers into their property. He confirmed that the Housing team had been asked to resolve this situation. The Portfolio Holder explained that this report was in a new format which sought to give Members an overview rather than providing large amounts of complex data. Members considered the new report format was useful and appropriate and congratulated the Policy and Performance Officer on a good report.

Resolved:

That the report be received and noted.

337 Future Reviews and Report Tracker

The Senior Scrutiny Officer advised that there were no reports available for the March O&S meeting. It was therefore agreed that there would be no meeting in March.

Resolved:

That

- (i) the Future Reviews and Report Tracker be noted;**
- (ii) the March meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee be cancelled.**

Queries concerning these Minutes? Please contact Rosie Reid:
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