

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 **24th February 2015**.

Present:

Cllr. Davison (Vice-Chairman in the Chair);

Cllrs. Apps, Burgess, Mrs Dyer, Feacey, Mrs Hutchinson, Miss Martin, Mrs Martin, Mortimer, Sims.

In accordance with Procedure Rule 1.2(iii) Councillor Mrs Dyer attended as a Substitute Member for Councillor Bartlett.

Apologies:

Cllrs. Adby, Bartlett, Hodgkinson.

Also Present:

Cllrs. Cloughton, Galpin.

Chief Inspector Mitchell Fox – Kent Police.

Head of Health, Parking and Community Safety, Health, Parking and Community Safety Manager, Policy and Performance Officer, Senior Scrutiny Officer, Member Services & Scrutiny Support Officer.

365 Declaration of Interest

Councillor	Interest	Minute No.
Sims	Made a 'Voluntary Announcement' as the Neighbourhood Watch Co-ordinator for his area.	367

366 Minutes

Resolved:

That the Minutes of the Meeting of this Committee held on the 27th January 2015 be approved and confirmed as a correct record.

367 Ashford Community Safety Partnership: an update on the Community Safety Partnership activity in the Borough

The Head of Health, Parking and Community Safety introduced the item. She

advised the Committee that the report represented the annual report on the work undertaken by the Community Safety Partnership (CSP). The Committee had a statutory responsibility to review the work of the CSP; she welcomed feedback from the Committee on this. She wished to highlight some of the achievements of the CSP over the past 12 months and some areas for improvement. Anti-social behaviour (ASB) had reduced in the Borough by 42% during 2013/14; this was due to a number of initiatives including Operation Claxon, co-ordinated by the Police. The levels of fly-tipping in the Borough had however increased throughout this period and it was clear that this needed to be an area to focus on. Criminal damage had also decreased, however incidents of domestic abuse continued to rise. The latter had been supported through the implementation of the One Stop Shop at the Willow Centre, Brookfield Road, which was the busiest in Kent. The Council had committed £50,000 over the next three years to support the work around domestic abuse and had appointed a One Stop Shop and Freedom Co-ordinator.

Referring to road safety, the Head of Health, Parking and Community Safety advised that road traffic accidents had increased, with the number of under-16's being killed or seriously injured being the highest in the County. This would be another area of focus over the coming year.

Chief Inspector Fox wished to highlight the successful work carried out by the CSP in relation to ASB, with the level now being the lowest in Kent. The CSP involved partners working together to resolve issues throughout the Borough. KCC Wardens played a large part of this work and attended daily meetings with the Police Community Support Officers (PSCO's) and the Police. Operation Claxon, which targeted ASB, was an ongoing success story. As part of this, two PCSO's were assigned daily to focus on ASB.

Referring to rural crime, the Chief Inspector acknowledged that around 45% of residents lived in rural, isolated areas and highlighted the significant work being undertaken to reduce crime in these areas. This was an ongoing target and he assured the Committee that they were not complacent about this. The Chief Inspector then commended the work undertaken at the One Stop Shop in respect of domestic abuse. This work had resulted in partners being able to protect a number of vulnerable people who had effectively walked in off the street for help. Overall the resources available to the Police were tighter than before, with reductions in officer numbers being inevitable. The importance of partnership working would be key in terms of mitigating the effect of reduced resources.

The Head of Health, Parking and Community Safety drew Members' attention to page 14 of the report and the feedback received from other partners involved in the CSP. The next CSP meeting, in March, would look at the terms of reference of the CSP and its membership. It was hoped that the membership could be increased, with potential new partners such as Tenterden Town Council and Victims Support (Ashford).

The Vice-Chairman in the Chair then opened up the discussion and the following points were raised:

- The Portfolio Holder for Health & Wellbeing, Education & Skills and Community Safety welcomed the potential new partners for the CSP.

Partnership working could not be emphasised strongly enough. The report was comprehensive and he wanted to thank the Officers for their hard work. It was beneficial to have all of the statistics available. It was important not to be complacent; there were areas that remained cause for concern, including violent crime and domestic abuse. The perception of crime was important too. The reduction in ASB should be commended but there was still more to do in this area. The Portfolio Holder also highlighted the work undertaken by the Street Pastors, who worked in co-operation with the Police. This was an example of an initiative that had worked well in the Borough.

- In response to a question regarding the expected increase in population in the Borough due to development and the number of Police Officers, Chief Inspector Fox advised there were going to be large scale reductions which would mean less Police Officers and PCSO's on the street. This reduction meant that the Police Service needed to find ways to work smarter. Partnership working would enable this to a degree. The Chief Inspector acknowledged the importance of ensuring a visible presence. Planning of new developments was key to 'designing out crime', recent developments in the area had low crime rates and this should be commended. If areas appeared run-down then they attracted a criminal element. Responding to community safety issues quickly was important.
- A number of Members drew attention to the levels of oil thefts from rural areas and questioned what could be done about this. Chief Inspector Fox advised that the level of oil thefts had been low for a long time, however, the level had increased recently. These thefts bore a huge financial cost to the victims and the level of time between theft and realisation of the theft could be as long as three months. These were not easy thefts to commit and he urged residents to be vigilant. A Member, who had experience working in the oil industry, advised that residents should ensure that their oil tanks were hidden. If suspicious activity was taking place then instead of looking for oil tankers at strange times residents should be vigilant of transit style vans that smelt of oil, as it was possible that the vans had high capacity tanks installed in the back of them. Chief Inspector Fox added that the Police were mindful of the level of oil thefts which was a cross border issue. The Police undertook operations in connection with HMRC, who could access any land without a warrant, to ascertain if any oil/diesel was present where the relevant tax had not been paid. In conjunction with this they were working with the farming community to encourage them to be on the lookout for and report any suspicious activity.
- Members felt that an area in which the Police could improve was keeping victims informed of progress with their case. Members provided a number of examples of instances of crime being reported where the victim was not kept informed. Chief Inspector Fox acknowledged that this was an area consistently highlighted in satisfaction surveys. There were difficulties with 24 hour policing and the shifts that many Officers worked meant that contacting people at sociable hours was not always possible. The introduction of tablets for Officers would make a big difference for the taking of statements and enabling faster working practices.
- In connection with rural crime Chief Inspector Fox advised that work was

being undertaken to recruit Special Constables, they would be based in a Parish and would only undertake work there. This was an opportunity to increase a Police presence in the area.

- The Heath, Parking and Community Safety Manager advised Members of Operation Cleansweep, a cross partnership operation that involved people gaining intelligence, passing on advice to residents as well as security devices. This had been carried out in Smarden 18 months previously following a rise in oil thefts and resulted in these thefts dropping considerably. This was a worthwhile approach and had also been carried out in Newtown and Willesborough recently.
- A Member raised concern about the number of priorities detailed in the report. He was concerned that there were too many with the possibility that the list was simply stating all the things that the CSP worked on. Chief Inspector Fox felt that this was a valid point, however, the list reflected the diverse make up of the CSP partners. For example, road safety would be a focus of Kent Fire and Rescue Service. The Head of Health, Parking and Community Safety advised that the extra priorities were areas for partners to have 'in mind' when developing their own delivery plans. She acknowledged that the programme of work was ambitious and they would not always meet all of the targets set. It had been agreed that a Council Officer be given responsibility to keep on top of the Tactical Delivery Plan and progress being made against the various targets set.
- Members suggested that Neighbourhood Watch be promoted more. Chief Inspector Fox added that this would be looked into. In addition an 'App' was due to be launched that would enable people to report issues directly to Kent Police which would be reviewed and forwarded to the relevant department. This would be a modern twist on Neighbourhood Watch.
- Concern was raised regarding safeguarding children and its connection to the priority list. Chief Inspector Fox advised that there were established practices in place to deal with safeguarding issues; these were set out in statute. Police were dedicated to this and he assured Members that interventions took place when necessary.
- Members questioned whether there had been any connections drawn between the turning off of street lights by the County Council and increase in crime. Chief Inspector Fox advised that Kent Police had been consulted regarding the light switch off and had given their advice on the matter, it was however Kent County Council who had made the decision to proceed. At the current time there was no statistical evidence to show that there had been an increase in crime, however the public perception on this matter differed. He urged Members to raise their concerns directly with Kent County Council.
- Several Members raised the issue of dangerous parking near schools. The Health, Parking and Community Safety Manager advised that Officers were aware of this issue and this was addressed through Operation Cleansweep and other methods. Kent Fire and Rescue Service's road safety plan aimed

to address this and they could attempt to drive a Fire Appliance down the road to draw attention to this issue. Work can be, and was, undertaken with schools to encourage children to influence their parents about safe parking and driving near schools. The Head of Health, Parking and Community Safety added that this could be discussed at the next CSP meeting and encouraged Members to email with feedback on any specific evidence relevant to this issue.

- There was some discussion regarding legal highs and the availability of them in the Borough. Chief Inspector Fox advised that the Police worked closely with Trading Standards on this and had co-ordinated a raid on the shop in the Town Centre. A close watch had since been maintained on the goings on around this shop. This was an issue that was taken very seriously. Work was needed with young people on this subject and it was hoped that the involvement of a Headteacher at future CSP meetings would help to progress this. In respect of a query regarding the making of a Public Space Protection Order to prevent the taking of substances in the Town, Members were advised that this was very new legislation which would be looked at and recent Orders elsewhere in the country would be reviewed.
- Policing of licenced premises was carried out to ensure that ASB did not occur as a result of binge drinking in the Borough. The Street Pastors had contributed greatly to the work in this area and had made a big difference to date.
- The Health, Parking and Community Safety Manager advised that since the installation of the gate at St Mary's churchyard, Ashford the number of instances of ASB had dropped considerably. This had been considered a success and therefore Kent County Council have agreed to extend the gating order to allow this to be in place.
- Fly-tipping remained a problem in the Borough and a lot of work was needed in this area. Assurances had been given from the relevant post-holder at the Council that work in this area would commence this year. This would be monitored through the CSP.

Resolved:

That the report be received and noted.

Recommended:

The Overview and Scrutiny Committee recommends to Cabinet that the report be promoted as an excellent example of partnership working.

368 ABC Business Plan Performance Report Q3 2014-15

The Portfolio Holder for Finance, Budget and Resource Management commended the report to the Committee. He felt that it showed the achievements of the Borough and the positive influence of the Council. After the Election, the format and

information presented in the report would be assessed and the Portfolio Holder welcomed any comments from Members on this.

The Policy and Performance Officer introduced the report. He highlighted a number of areas that had seen improvement, included a decrease in benefits cases, the impact of Christchurch Road on B&B stays and strong performance in relation to planning applications. In the subsequent discussion the following points were raised:

- Universal Credit would be introduced in April which would work in favour of those actively looking for work. A lot of work had gone into preparing for this, and a partnership initiative 'The HUB' had been implemented to assist with this.
- A Member was concerned about the number of properties with a current gas safety certificate. The Policy and Performance Officer advised that the process was carried out over a 12 month rolling programme hence the slight fluctuation in figures. He would request for and provide the Member with the month by month statistics relating to this.
- In respect of food premises those that failed to meet the requirements were given guidance on how to improve, giving them the opportunity to rectify any issues highlighted.

Resolved:

That the report be received and noted.

369 Future Reviews and Report Tracker

The Vice-Chairman in the Chair reminded Members that the April meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee had been cancelled due to election commitments.

The Senior Scrutiny Officer advised that the report requested in respect of Commercial Property would be on the agenda for the March meeting. It was requested that any questions from Members be directed to the Senior Scrutiny Officer by 9th March to enable Officers to consult the professional advisers and report the answers at that meeting.

There was discussion regarding whether the Committee should undertake a review of each department given the changes to staffing and structure over the past few years. Members felt that the Budget Scrutiny Task Group undertook this work and they should be left to do so. It was also felt that any decision on this should be left until after the Elections in May.

Resolved:

That the report be received and noted.

Queries concerning these Minutes? Please contact Kirsty Morland:
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