

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 **23rd February 2016**.

Present:

Cllr. Chilton (Chairman)

Cllr. Michael (Vice-Chairman)

Cllrs. Burgess, Hicks, A. Howard, Knowles, Krause, Link, Wedgbury.

Apologies:

Cllr. Feacey, Sims.

Also Present:

Cllrs. Bradford, Shorter.

Deputy Chief Executive, Head of Health, Parking & Community Safety, Health, Parking & Community Safety Manager, Community Safety Operations Manager, Member Services & Scrutiny Manager, Member Services & Scrutiny Support Officer.

Chief Inspector Mitchell Fox – Kent Police.

340 Declarations of Interest

Councillor	Interest	Minute No.
Bradford	Made a "Voluntary Announcement" as a former member of the Emergency Services	342
Wedgbury	Made a "Voluntary Announcement" as a former member of the Emergency Services	342

341 Minutes

Resolved:

That the Minutes of the Meeting of this Committee held on the 26th January 2016 be approved and confirmed as a correct record.

342 Ashford Community Safety Partnership – Annual Update

Chief Inspector Mitchell Fox from Kent Police introduced the item and commended

the Ashford Community Safety Partnership (ACSP) for the fantastic work that had been done and thanked the Health, Parking & Community Safety Manager and Community Safety Operations Manager for their valued involvement.

The Chairman and Vice-Chairman had submitted questions in advance of the meeting and invited the team to respond. The following responses were given to questions/comments: -

- In response to a question asking for further information in terms of what initiatives were planned for the new Prevent Duty and combatting Child Sexual Exploitation, the Health, Parking & Community Safety Manager talked firstly about Prevent. A working group had been formed and its primary aim was to explore ways of diverting people away from extremism. Various agencies including Kent Police, Kent Probation Service, Kent Fire and Rescue, local schools, local mosques as well as Ashford Borough Council were involved with co-ordinating training sessions to raise awareness of the subject. Another group to combat Child Sexual Exploitation had been formed, but was in the very early stages. A training session would be taking place in April and an Action Plan was being formulated.
- A request was made for an explanation on how the Kent Community Safety Team (KCST) worked with ACSP, and was the co-location of staff in the Unit at Maidstone delivering results. The Health, Parking & Community Safety Manager advised that it was early days for the KCST. A representative from KCST attending meetings with ACSP and provided feedback on county based activities. The relationship was two ways therefore ACSP members were able to report on issues that would be more appropriately tackled on a county basis. Positive feedback had been received regarding the Unit at Maidstone, but again, it was still in the early stages.
- In response to a request made for figures that showed the level of crimes (resulting from substance abuse) that were solved, Chief Inspector Fox explained that following an inspection by HMIC, a recommendation was made that statistics of this nature no longer be recorded. Substance abuse encompassed both legal and illegal substances and there were difficulties associated with identifying crimes that fell within these areas. From a general perspective, crime in Ashford was lower than 12 months previous and Chief Inspector Fox advised that people were also increasingly reporting historical crimes. Members discussed the impact of this on police resources and what could be done to change public perception that some crimes were not worth reporting. Chief Inspector Fox said that a change in approach was being undertaken and Officers were now investigating and probing further beyond the initial crime reported.
- A question was asked as to why the incidents of anti-social behaviour had continued to decrease. The Health, Parking & Community Safety Manager advised that this was the result of ACSP working together with the Police and the Joint Family Management Programme (JFMP) dealing with the perpetrators of anti-social behaviour. Where appropriate, referrals were made to Early Help, through which the troubled families programme could be assessed. Members asked if there was any liaison between KCST and social

landlords regarding anti-social behaviour by tenants. The Health, Parking & Community Safety Manager confirmed that many social landlords had designated Officers that worked with ACSP and in some cases a visit would be arranged and the tenancy agreement would be examined to see if terms had been broken. Chief Inspector Fox added that the police would get involved where illegal substance abuse was suspected.

- Fly tipping and dog fouling were considered a high priority for Ashford residents. A question asking how many cautions had been issued had been put forward. The Health, Parking & Community Safety Manager explained that there had not been any official cautions. Dog fouling would be dealt with by issuing a Fixed Penalty Notice under the dog fouling order. A fly tipping case was going to prosecution – a charge had been laid regarding a case by Tonbridge and Malling Borough Council. A few others were being investigated, but no formal cautions had been issued. New ways of working were also under review and would be relayed to members in due course.
- Members asked if there were any plans for Cleansweep events to be held and what steps were being taken to change attitudes from an early age i.e. visits to schools. The Health, Parking & Community Safety Manager confirmed one event was planned and it would be taking place in the town centre. The team did not normally plan for more than one event in advance and tended to set them up as a response to what was happening on the ground. Partners would make requests to the Community Safety Unit who then organised the events. Examples of work within schools included Safety in Action, work on anti-social behaviour & road safety and on-going contact via a Head Teacher who was a member of ACSP. This was linked to the ongoing work with Prevent and on combatting Child Sexual Exploitation.
- At the O&S meeting last year the issue of keeping victims of crime informed of progress was raised. Members asked what steps had been introduced to improve this issue. Chief Inspector Fox advised the Committee that the case officer assigned had a duty to keep the victim informed, and then post charge, responsibility fell to the Witness Care Unit or Victim Support Unit. Work had been undertaken to modernise court attendance and Chief Inspector Fox anticipated that physical presence within court could become obsolete in the future.
- ACSP had a number of initiatives covering a wide variety of areas – Members asked whether all of these were achievable given the budget the Partnership had access to. The Head of Health, Parking & Community Safety explained that the majority of ACSP work was undertaken using the individual partner's core budget. The role of the ACSP was to find common priorities and work collectively so that resources were not wasted. A specific grant came from the Police Crime Commissioner, and this was year 2 of a 3 year funding commitment. However, even this had been threatened for this year due to funding pressures on the police.
- Members noted that there was an increase in instances of shoplifting and the report inferred that this was possibly due to variables in sentencing. Chief Inspector Fox explained that sentencing for shoplifting generally remained

less than sentencing for similar crimes e.g. burglary and many perpetrators were aware of this.

- It was reported last year that the level of under 16's being killed or seriously injured (KSI's) in road accidents in Ashford was amongst the highest in the county. The question asked what measures were being taken to reduce this figure and had consideration been given to establishing a young driver school (similar to the one at Bluewater). The Head of Health, Parking & Community Safety confirmed that a lot of work had been undertaken on this subject focusing on accident cluster sites within the borough. This led to a route study on the A28, since this route was found to have the highest number of KSI's. A new focused approach involving all major stakeholders was being developed and a number of actions would be implemented over the next year in connection with the A28. Councillor Bradford would be working with officers to identify causes and look at possible sources of funding. The Health, Parking & Community Safety Manager reported that a two wheeler event had been scheduled to raise awareness for users of motorbikes, mopeds and scooters and Kent Fire and Rescue Service were building the first and only purpose built road safety centre in the UK. This would be dedicated to improving the driving experience of all road users. The aim was to encourage young people to look at the potential consequences of a road accident from all perspectives – for themselves, their passengers, other drivers and their families.
- Members asked for an explanation, regarding domestic abuse, on how the initiatives supported by the Council were contributing to the work of ACSP. The Head of Health, Parking & Community Safety advised that a report on domestic abuse had been presented to Cabinet and illustrated all of the positive work that was taking place. A Member asked what was being done to tackle the stigma attached to men experiencing domestic abuse. The Health, Parking & Community Safety Manager stated the domestic abuse services were also available to men. It was emphasised that the Council had committed to spend up to £50k per year over the next three years on domestic abuse and a Domestic Abuse Co-Ordinator had been appointed and priorities agreed.
- Members asked what action could be taken to prevent cars parking on pavements. Chief Inspector Fox explained that parking enforcement was dealt with as a civil offence, not a criminal offence; therefore the police had restricted powers and would only get involved when danger was presented. The Head of Health, Parking and Community Safety indicated that while the Council had power to deal with illegally parked vehicles this did not extend to obstruction of a footpath. The Council did not have the necessary authorisation from KCC to deal with this.
- The Chairman and Members agreed the ACSP was very pro-active and dynamic in its approach and had contributed greatly to reducing the amount of crime occurring in Ashford. The Health, Parking & Community Safety Manager relayed his thanks to both Community Safety Operations Managers for their work in compiling the report.

Resolved:

That the report be received and noted.

343 ABC Business Plan Performance Report

The Deputy Chief Executive introduced the report advising that it showed a continual steady progress of economic growth within Ashford. The free parking initiative in Edinburgh Road Car Park had contributed positively with regard to visitors to the town and approval had been given for significant development along Elwick Road. There had been a continued fall in un-employment figures and Service Performance remained steady.

The Chairman and Vice-Chairman had submitted questions in advance of the meeting and invited the Deputy Chief Executive to respond. The following responses were given to questions/comments: -

- In response to a question asking how many affordable homes had been built and sold over the last year, the Deputy Chief Executive explained that 300 affordable homes had been completed in a 12 month period, and 214 of those were exclusively for the affordable rental market. The 86 remaining properties were for shared ownership schemes and of those, 29 had been provided for first time buyers. A Member said that rents remained high and unaffordable to some people. The Deputy Chief Executive agreed that national statistics highlighted the problem of affordability. Therefore the more that ABC could do to increase the supply of affordable housing, the better the overall picture would be in the longer term. The Portfolio Holder suggested a report written by the Deputy Chief Executive for the Council Tax and Welfare Reform Task Group which assessed the risks of the Council's exposure to greater financial and service pressure, from a combination of future welfare reform impacts, the local housing market, the local economy and macro-economic factors, be re-circulated to Members.
- The Deputy Chief Executive advised the Committee of the missing figures from the Technical Annex for Homelessness:
Number of homeless applications received – 59
Number of homeless applications approved – 39
A member asked what happened to those people presenting themselves as homeless but their applications were not accepted. The Deputy Chief Executive confirmed that there were various reasons for non-qualification as homeless. If a non-UK and non-EU citizen (though some special conditions apply) were not eligible because they were subject to immigration control, then they would be referred to the Home Office. If they qualified as homeless, but did not have a local connection to Ashford then they would be given housing advice; in all cases the Council had a duty to provide housing advice.

- A Member raised a concern about the increase in the number of families in B&B accommodation. The Deputy Chief Executive concurred that this remained a pressure despite the Council's positive actions and something Members and officers needed to be aware of, particularly as the number of younger people presenting had risen. The Portfolio Holder added that although it was a normal trend for peaks and troughs to occur, it remained a serious issue and one that would impact financially on the Council.
- Members asked for more information with reference to the move of the Customer Services team from the Gateway to the Civic Centre. The Deputy Chief Executive advised that he would need to seek clarification from the Head of Environmental and Customer Service about the communications plans for users, but advised the building works to the Civic Centre reception area would commence very soon. The number of general enquiries had increased when the function moved to the Gateway in 2013, possibly because of the location being closer to the Town Centre. A fully appointment-only service now operated 5 days per week which worked very well and had resulted in the number of face to face appointments reducing, whilst the number of people using the 'fast-track' service had increased. The Deputy Chief Executive said that Officers would evaluate after the move to establish any detrimental effects.
- The Deputy Chief Executive pointed out that the figure for % sundry debtor income on the Technical Annex page had been updated since a payment for £900k had been received in late December. The figure on the Technical Annex would now show as 95%.
- Members asked if food premises were required to close when they were served with Enforcement Notices and the Deputy Chief Executive and Head of Health, Parking & Community Safety confirmed that would be correct for serious cases, subject to a prohibition closure notice being served.
- A Member asked if the terminology used in the report could be changed from 'footfall' to 'pedestrian traffic' to avoid any confusion. The Portfolio Holder agreed this point should be noted, but the priority was to examine the trends occurring.

The Chairman thanked the Deputy Chief Executive for his attendance.

Resolved:

That the report be received and noted.

344 Future Reviews and Report Tracker

The Chairman explained that Cllr. Mrs. Martin had asked the committee to review the local Hospital Trust. The Committee agreed with the Chairman that this request should be referred to the Health and Wellbeing Board.

Cllr. Mrs. Martin had also requested the committee review flooding to assess if the

Council were doing enough. Members asked the Chairman to respond to Cllr. Mrs. Martin for more specific information about what to review, and considered that the Emergency Preparedness Team would also need to be included.

The Chairman asked the Committee how they wished to proceed following the presentations made to the January meeting by Southern and South East Water. Some Members reported that they were still awaiting answers to questions raised at the meeting and asked the Member Services & Scrutiny Manager to check progress on responses to the questions raised.

It was agreed that it would be useful for the Internal Drainage Board to be invited to the meeting in April. A Member suggested also inviting the Project Delivery Manager to the meeting for his contribution.

Resolved

- That**
- (i) the Chairman seek more information about the request to review flooding**
 - (ii) The River Stour Internal Drainage Board be invited to the O&S meeting in April 2016.**
 - (iii) The Committee meeting scheduled for 22nd March 2016 be cancelled.**

Queries concerning these Minutes? Please contact Clare Ricketts:
Telephone: 01233 330499 Email: clare.ricketts@ashford.gov.uk
Agendas, Reports and Minutes are available on: www.ashford.gov.uk/committees