

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 **28th February 2017**.

Present:

Cllr. Chilton (Chairman)

Cllrs. Burgess, Feacey, Hicks, A. Howard, Krause, Link, Mrs. Martin, Michael, Mrs. Webb.

In accordance with Procedure Rule 1.2 (iii) Cllr. Mrs Webb attended as Substitute Member for Cllr. Adby.

Apologies:

Cllrs. Adby, Shorter.

Also Present:

Cllr. Bradford, Smith.

Detective Inspector Andrew Bidmead - Kent Police, Elizabeth Tweed – Chair of the Ashford Domestic Abuse Forum, Head of Health Parking & Community Safety, Health Parking and Community Safety Manager, Health, Parking and Community Safety Manager, Senior Policy, Performance & Scrutiny Officer, Corporate Scrutiny and Overview Officer, Member Services Officer.

318 Declaration of Interest

Councillor	Interest	Minute No.
Feacey	Made a "Voluntary Announcement" as the Chairman of the Ashford Volunteer Bureau.	320

319 Minutes

Resolved:

That the Minutes of the Meeting of this Committee held on the 24th January 2017 be approved and confirmed as a correct record.

320 Community Safety Partnership Annual Update

The Head of Health Parking & Community Safety introduced this item and said how positive it was to be able to share with the Committee the work that the Community

Safety Partnership (CSP) had undertaken over the past year and welcomed feedback from Members to help develop plans for the next year. The Chairman then opened up this item for discussion, and the following questions/comments were made:

- The Health Parking and Community Safety Manager confirmed that there were nine partner organisations that made up the structure of the Community Safety Partnership Group.
- A Member asked whether in-depth investigations had been undertaken into slavery and domestic abuse in the borough. DI Bidmead confirmed that a police operation was ongoing to tackle these issues in both urban and rural areas and so far this year approximately 16 individuals had been rescued from slavery. The Head of Health Parking & Community Safety explained that Anti-Social Behaviour (ASB) was still a priority for the CSP but compared to other areas in the County, Ashford had the lowest levels of ASB and the emphasis was to maintain this strong position.
- Elizabeth Tweed explained that the One Stop Shop (OSS) was based at the Willow Centre in Brookfield Road and funding had been granted from ABC for the post of OSS & Freedom Programme Co-ordinator. Initially this was £50,000 per annum for 3 years and they were pleased to learn that Cabinet had agreed to fund this post permanently.
- In response to a question asking whether the operation to tackle slavery included traveller sites, DI Bidmead confirmed that they were included and this could often be linked to operations around organised crime in those areas.
- One Member noted that the table on Page 7 could be clearer if the data were instead displayed by borough. The Health Parking and Community Safety Manager explained that the table indicated where the OSS's were located, but would group by borough in future reports.
- DI Bidmead discussed the increase in hate crimes after the Brexit vote and confirmed that the number of incidents reported had almost doubled. Although this was clearly a concern, the incidents were mainly low level, and this was thought to be a result of members of the public feeling more confident when expressing their personal opinions since the Brexit vote. An Independent Police Advisory Group had been formed to provide support to victims.
- A Member asked for clarification on the 101 telephone service and why some users had experienced such a long wait for their call to be answered. DI Bidmead explained that the service had encountered problems last year but procedures had now been reviewed and a new web contact method had been introduced. Since June last year the average answer time had improved from 5 minutes to 1 minute. Another Member noted that if Police Community Support Officer's (PCSO's) were available after 6pm, this might help ease the pressure on the 101 service. DI Bidmead explained that a

new policing model was expected from September 2017, which could help to alleviate the problem. Currently 22 PCSO's were routinely employed in the borough.

- The Chairman asked if there had been any impact following the decision to remove PCSO's from Parish Council meetings. DI Bidmead explained that the PCSO's were still communicating with Parish Councils and information was made available on the police website for them to use at meetings. He went on to explain that with current financial restraints it was more beneficial for the PCSO's to be out on the job, rather than attending meetings.
- In response to a question regarding reduced resources for youth projects and ASB, the Head of Health Parking & Community Safety spoke about the importance of supporting our partners working with young people such as Early Help & Preventative Services. Reference was also made to the Troubled Families Programme and Local Children's Partnership Group.
- A Member queried the figures relating to visits made to the OSS's and Elizabeth Tweed confirmed that 316 people visited the Centre in 2014/2015. They were conscious that some clients were "hard to reach" either geographically or because of their culture, and there were plans to recruit an outreach worker in order to help with this problem.
- In response to a question regarding Road Safety figures in the report, the Head of Health Parking & Community Safety clarified that 'Crashes – all ages' referred to the number of collisions whereas 'Casualties – all ages' referred to the number of people injured.
- A Member asked if there were any plans to implement a programme to rehabilitate the perpetrators of domestic abuse. Elizabeth Tweed said that there was a pilot programme being run in Medway costing £20k, the results of which would be reviewed to determine effectiveness before running such a programme in Ashford.
- Members discussed the feedback they had received from residents around lack of visibility of police officers in the area, but all agreed that this was inevitable considering the financial restrictions placed on the police. They reinforced the importance of encouraging the general public to report all incidents as quickly as possible using the channels available to them.
- The Head of Health Parking & Community Safety talked in more detail about the priorities recommended for 2017/2018 and explained that there was no additional funding beyond that provided by the Kent Police and Crime Commissioner. Additional funding for projects would have to be sourced from CSP partners.
- The Chairman asked if any specific measures were in place to tackle shoplifting and robberies taking place around the town centre. DI Bidmead reported that there were plans to re-design the town centre area and put on extra patrols. Although the number of robberies and thefts had remained

fairly constant, better results were seen throughout December and January 2016 after increasing patrols in the town. He did acknowledge that policing needed to improve in retail areas.

- The Health Parking and Community Safety Manager reported that there had been no impact on crime figures regarding the KCC decision to switch off lights in certain areas of the borough, however KCC were now installing LED lights and so they were being switched back on. He also confirmed that the police had reviewed their figures and could find no appreciable increase in Anti-Social Behaviour relating to alleyways.
- The Portfolio Holder thanked the Head of Health Parking & Community Safety and both Health Parking and Community Safety Managers for their work on the CSP. He assured Members that a good working relationship had been built with the local police force and he was confident that this would only get better going forward. Reporting rates of domestic abuse had increased, which showed that the public had more confidence when reporting these types of crimes. Funding had been secured from the Kent Police & Crime Commissioner, and this only served to demonstrate the strength of the CSP and the forward thinking of ABC.

Resolved:

That the Report be noted.

321 Quarter 3 Performance Report

The Senior Policy, Performance & Scrutiny Officer introduced this item and explained that Members would be receiving an online Questionnaire to complete ahead of the Performance Dashboard entering its second year.

The Chairman opened up the item for discussion and the following questions/comments were made:

- A Member commented that the report was very good, but referred to Page 46 and advised that “Footfall” should instead read “Town Centre Footfall”.
- The Chairman asked if Members should be concerned that figures indicating levels of food business hygiene had dropped over the last year. The Head of Health Parking & Community Safety and the Senior Policy, Performance & Scrutiny Officer assured the Committee that there were natural fluctuations within the figures and that overall standards remained extremely good so there was no need for concern. All food businesses within the borough had to be registered and inspected and the results were displayed as a Food Hygiene Rating which was publically available via the council’s website.
- A Member commented that if the information from the report was to be made public, then there would need to be succinct differentiation between Ashford and the Ashford Borough.

- A Member commented that it could be useful for the report to contain the actual number of new homes built.
- A Member enquired whether the new property to provide temporary accommodation to homeless people had been purchased yet. The Senior Policy, Performance & Scrutiny Officer confirmed that this was still being considered.

Resolved:

That the Report be noted.

322 Future Reviews and Report Tracker and Topic Selection Flowchart

The Chairman told the Committee that the Safeguarding Report would be given at the next meeting. Members asked when they could expect air quality and pollution to be discussed. The Corporate Scrutiny and Overview Officer explained that it was hoped that a draft document could be presented to the Committee by early summer 2017.

Resolved:

That the Report Tracker be received and noted.

Queries concerning these Minutes? Please contact Clare Ricketts:
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