

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 **11th February 2020**

Present:

Cllr. Ovenden (Chairman)
Cllr. Michael (Vice-Chairman)

Cllrs. Burgess, Farrell, Forest, Howard-Smith, Iliffe, Krause, Ledger, Link, Mulholland, Spain.

In accordance with Procedure Rule 1.2(c) Cllr Spain attended as Substitute Member for Cllr. Chilton.

Apologies:

Cllr. Chilton.

Policy & Scrutiny Officer

Also Present:

Cllrs Bartlett, Feacey.

Inspector Atkinson

Head of Corporate Policy, ED & Communications, Compliance and Data Protection Manager, Community Safety and Wellbeing Manager, Housing Operations Manager, Community Safety and Resilience Team Leader, Community Safety Officer, Member Services Officer.

298 Minutes of the Last Meeting

Resolved:

That the Minutes of this Committee held on the 21st January 2020 be approved and confirmed as an accurate record.

299 Community Safety Partnership Update

The Community Safety and Wellbeing Manager introduced this item and outlined the 4 priorities for 2019/2020. She explained that the Community Safety Partnership (CSP) continued to work effectively with all partners in their efforts to reduce crime and anti-social behaviour in the Borough, and the report illustrated this in more detail.

The report was then opened up to the Committee and the following questions and

points were raised: -

- A Member asked whether the CSP and partners were sufficiently resourced to continue with their work, particularly when considering the predicted growth of the Borough. The Community Safety and Wellbeing Manager confirmed that they had recently recruited a full time Community Safety Officer, on an 18 month contract and the Environmental Team were recruiting an Environmental Enforcement Team Leader and Officer to assist with environmental crime including littering and fly-tipping. Insp. Atkinson advised that the Police had recently recruited 472 Officers, and 10 would be employed locally around Ashford. Additional funding had been received from the Police Crime Commissioner (PCC) and this had aided the use of overtime to Officers. Funding from the PCC was also expected next year.
- Praise was given to the Central Forum that was held in November, with Members commenting that it was an extremely beneficial session and they wondered whether it could be made an annual event. Insp. Atkinson agreed that face to face forums worked very well in engaging different sectors of the Community. He added that there were plans to run drop in sessions specifically for Councillors to voice any concerns or specific problems in their ward.
- The Community Safety and Wellbeing Manager responded to a question asking about the Home-Start and DC Breathe schemes and referral processes. She confirmed that funding for Home-Start came from the PCC and people were able to self-refer. Various courses had been run and were aimed towards engaging specific groups DC Breathe was an emotional wellbeing scheme and the project involved working with year 5 pupils to cover issues such as resilience, anxiety and self-esteem. This was also funded by the PCC.
- In response to a query regarding police cells in Ashford Police Station, Insp Atkinson confirmed that he was unaware of any plans, but would welcome extra cells to reduce the pressure of transporting prisoners to other stations.
- Page 8 and 9 of the report covered ASB Data and a Member commented that after taking into effect the increase in reporting of incidents, this may have a knock on effect on the true figures of crimes resolved. Insp. Atkinson echoed the importance of encouraging the public to report all crime. All incidents were recorded, although not all were investigated. He spoke about a recent disturbance that had occurred in the Town Centre, and explained that using the Section 60 police powers to stop and search, had led to arrests unrelated to the incident including carrying a knife.
- The Committee went on to discuss in detail the growing problem of 'County Lines', both locally and nationally. Insp. Atkinson explained that people of all ages and backgrounds were affected and exploited by 'County Lines' and that no sooner was someone arrested and taken out of the movement, regrettably that void would be filled instantly, often by children or vulnerable adults. Members asked if there were any approaches or strategies to make 'County

Lines' less attractive for criminals to target juveniles. Insp. Atkinson indicated that 'County Lines' was a type of modern day slavery, but that unfortunately some people chose to be involved. Children taken out of the system were safeguarded, and the adults consequently prosecuted. Work had been undertaken in partnership with Local Authorities to stop drug dealers taking over the homes of vulnerable people (known as cuckooing) by enforcing Closure Orders. Ashford was not one of the top 5 Boroughs in Kent to be affected by 'County Lines', but the problem was constant and so it required a relentless approach from all partners. A number of sessions had been arranged, aimed at parents and carers of young people, to assist in recognising early warning signs that may identify involvement with gangs, drug use or knife crime. These were taking place in Ashford and Tenterden and had been organised by the CSP. A Member commented that drug testing by employers could be a useful tool in helping to tackle drug problems in the Borough. Insp Atkinson agreed that a multi-faceted approach was needed and the Police would encourage employers to undertake any proactive schemes to assist in deterring drug consumption, since 'County Lines' was now estimated to be worth approximately £7bn per year. A Member enquired whether the use of sniffer dogs could be increased in public places around Ashford. Insp. Atkinson explained that unfortunately due to austerity, a number of dogs had been lost, but it was hoped that this would soon be reviewed. He asked the Committee if the idea of introducing more sniffer dogs would be favourable and the Committee unanimously agreed.

Resolved

That the report be received and noted, and the CSP priorities for 2020/2021 be supported by the Committee.

300 Safeguarding Update

The Housing Operations Manager introduced the report which covered activities since April 2019 and results from the annual review undertaken by the Safeguarding Lead Officers Group. In April 2020, the Housing Operations Manager and Community Safety and Wellbeing Manager would be exchanging roles, owing to the creation of new posts and additional independency. She went on to explain that only 23% of Members had completed their safeguarding training, which was disappointing since the Members Training Panel had concluded that safeguarding would form part of the obligatory training courses. The Team had seen an increasing number of referrals, which reinforced how imperative the training was for all members of staff and Councillors.

The report was then opened up to the Committee and the following questions and points were raised: -

- The Member Training Champion expressed his disappointment with the uptake figures and proposed a recommendation that the Member Panel organise safeguarding training for all Members to attend. The Chairman agreed that the training should be made compulsory. The Housing Operations Manager advised that she was happy to arrange further face-to-

face training sessions with the Council's Training Officer for Members.

- In response to a question regarding safeguarding training and certification obtained through other agencies, the Housing Operations Manager advised that this was acceptable but requested that Members show their certificates to the Member Services Manager to enable the files to be updated.
- The Community Safety and Wellbeing Manager spoke to the Committee about PREVENT training. She explained that this was a Government initiative to stop vulnerable people being exploited and drawn into terrorism. A briefing session had been arranged for Members prior to the Cabinet meeting in March, which would be presented by KCC's Head of PREVENT. A separate PREVENT training module was mandatory for staff.
- The Housing Operations Manager explained to Members the procedure for referrals made to the Safeguarding team and confirmed that the Council followed all referrals up after a 2-week period.
- A Member asked about the Safety in Action workshop and it was confirmed that it was anticipated to run again in 2020 with Year 6 pupils being invited from a selection of Primary Schools in the Borough. Members would cordially be invited to the VIP day.

Recommended:

That Safeguarding training be made mandatory for all Councillors.

Resolved:

That the report be received and noted.

301 Overview and Scrutiny Work Programme 2020/21

The Compliance and Data Protection Manager introduced this item. She explained that the Selection Matrix had been approved by the Committee at the last meeting in January, but the Committee were now asked to consider any other topics that would benefit from scrutiny in 2020/2021 and identify topics that could be removed.

The report was opened up to the Committee and the following questions and points were raised: -

- The Chairman was pleased to observe Homelessness as a priority topic, along with Carbon Neutrality and Digital Transformation.
- A Member suggested that the Committee consider scrutiny of governance and the outsourcing of contracts. Referring to the Freedom Leisure Contract that had recently been procured, he stated that the Overview & Scrutiny Committee should ensure value for money, and a comment was made that there was a potential resource impact in line with the increase of outsourcing

contracts. It was agreed that this topic could be added to the Work programme, although specifically the Freedom Leisure contract was already established and therefore it was too late in the day to examine that particular contract. The Member observed that it was often the case that the Committee were post-scrutinising and the Chairman agreed that issues needed to be picked up by the Committee closer to the decision making stage, as opposed to after the decision had been made. The Compliance and Data Protection Manager would speak to the Procurement team to ascertain what contracts were upcoming.

- The Committee discussed the recent Ashford Visioning Event and a Member enquired whether any of the projects raised at the event would be coming to O&S. The Head of Corporate Policy, ED & Communications confirmed that it was intended for some of those topics to be reviewed by the Committee, a key one being Carbon Neutrality.
- A suggestion was made that the Committee consider scrutiny of the Council's commercial transactions and the Chairman agreed that this could be added to the Work Programme.
- A Member had observed that engagement with residents and key stakeholders often occurred during the later stages of the consultation process, and he wondered if the Council would benefit from earlier input from residents. The Head of Corporate Policy, ED & Communications agreed that input from residents was of great value, and the point of how best to engage had been included in the Residents Survey, the results of which could be shared with the Committee. A further comment was made that Parish Councils were not always representative of the whole community demographic, and therefore consultation via Parish Councils was not necessarily a true reflection of all views. The Chairman agreed to add Consultation onto the Work Programme.
- The subject of Broadband provision had been included in a Supplementary Planning Document and the Compliance and Data Protection Manager suggested this be presented to the Committee as a report for review.
- The subject of recruitment and retention within the Planning Dept. was discussed and it was confirmed that this topic would be brought forward for the Committee to review.
- The Chairman was keen to begin work on Digital Transformation and asked for volunteers to form a Task Group. Cllrs. Ledger, Forest, Iliffe and Spain offered to take part.

Resolved:

That the report be received and noted.

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