

sOverview and Scrutiny Committee

Minutes of a Meeting of the Overview & Scrutiny Committee held in Committee Room No. 2, Civic Centre, Tannery Lane, Ashford on the **14th March 2023**.

Present:

Cllr. Chilton (Vice-Chair in the Chair)

Cllrs. Blanford, Farrell, Hayward, Ledger, Meaden, Mulholland

Apologies:

Cllrs. Burgess, Ovenden (Chair).

In attendance:

Cllr. Bartlett

Chief Inspector Sarah Rivett and Detective Inspector Simon Johnson, Kent Police

Safety & Wellbeing Manager, Community Safety and Resilience Team Leader, Policy & Scrutiny Officer, Member Services Officer.

Also in Attendance (virtually)

Cllrs. Harman, Howard-Smith,

Policy & Performance Manager

346 Minutes

Resolved:

That the Minutes of the Meeting of this Committee held on the 14th February 2023 be approved and confirmed as a correct record.

347 Community Safety Partnership Update

The Community Safety and Resilience Team Leader introduced the report, which provided the annual update of Community Safety within the Borough and highlighted an overall decrease in many crime types including Anti-Social Behaviour (ASB) in Ashford.

The Chairman and Committee thanked the Officers for their comprehensive report, which was then opened up to the Committee and the following questions and points were raised: -

- The table at para 16 of the report revealed a large drop in ASB and a Member acknowledged that Covid and Lockdowns would have played only some part in that reduction. He queried what other factors could be attributed to the

figures and whether previous year's data would give a clearer depiction. The Community Safety and Resilience Team Leader explained that the current report only ever displayed two years (present and last year) at a time and that previous reports would evidence preceding year's data for comparison. She added that a wider time period could be included in the report going forward if the Committee requested that. DI Johnson explained that various social factors including the fallout from Covid and the economic crisis impacted the figures and types of crime and ASB had changed during and since that time. The methods for managing crime were also contributory factors.

- In response to a question asking whether any analysis had been undertaken on the components of ASB, to ascertain any correlation to locality, ethnicity or substance abuse, it was explained that the current system (called M3) was universally used as a reporting mechanism, but new systems to better categorise ASB were being explored. Further data analysis could be explored potentially once new systems were procured. In addition, annual strategic assessments were produced with data from various agencies and partners; this was being compiled by a consultant and would include the priorities for the CSP.
- DI Johnson confirmed that Home Office Counting Rules determined the rules about recording crime, and the definition of different types of crime. ASB was recorded via their logging system and was coded to define the type of ASB. Ultimately, other crimes could crossover and overlap into ASB.
- ASB would remain a priority for 2023/24 because of the detrimental impact it could have on communities and businesses and to continue the good work that was evidently underway. It also retained the spotlight on young people and street drinkers, and methods to manage their behaviours, support them and ultimately deter and prevent further ASB.
- Serious and Organised crime included knife crime and was often linked to drug use and County Line activity.
- Knife bins were generally well utilised in the Borough, with kitchen type knives being the most dominant. Requests from residents or communities for more knife bins would be considered, and was dependent on funding. The average cost was £3000 and they were emptied monthly.
- In response to a query regarding crime in rural areas, and Tenterden in particular, DI Johnson explained that the report highlighted the wards with the greatest crime figures, and clarified that the statistics were for Ashford Borough as a whole, including rural areas. Designated Officers were focussed on rural crime and were well supported by the Parish and Community. Tenterden did experience some ASB, particularly around the Town Centre, and CCTV had been implemented to tackle this.
- Chief Insp. Rivett confirmed that Kent Police were experiencing financial constraints in the current economic climate, alongside other public services. However, there had recently been an uplift in recruitment for Officers, funded separately by Central Government, which would result in twelve extra Officers

for Ashford Borough. The Neighbourhood Review was due for completion in June 2023, and this would likely result in more ward based Officers.

- The Portfolio Holder thanked Chief Inspector Sarah Rivett and Detective Inspector Simon Johnson for attending the Overview & Scrutiny meetings and KALC meetings, which had reinforced the good relationship between Kent Police and ABC. He added that Members also played a role as Councillors to bring any issues indicated by residents to the Police, ABC and/or KCC. Significant improvements had already been seen in Kennington and Bockhanger, and it was hoped that those enhancements would continue throughout Ashford and surrounding areas.

Resolved:

That the report be received and noted.

348 Safeguarding Update

The Safety & Wellbeing Manager introduced the report which detailed the work the Council had undertaken to meet its obligations in relation to safeguarding. It contained information on the support given to National Safeguarding Adult Awareness week and improvements to training for staff.

The Chairman and Committee thanked the Officers for their report, which was then opened up to the Committee and the following point was raised: -

- The Table on Page 38 of the report represented only referrals made by ABC staff, not instances recorded.

Resolved:

That the report be received and noted.

349 Future Reports Tracker

The Policy & Performance Manager confirmed that the item included on the Tracker to review the Freedom Leisure Contract was in relation to the Stour Centre and Julie Rose. Members spoke about the urgency to review the closure of Tenterden Leisure Centre.

Resolved:

That the Report Tracker be received and noted.

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