



OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Notice of a Meeting, to be held in the Civic Centre, Tannery Lane, Ashford, Kent, TN23 1PL on Tuesday, 14th March, 2023 at 7.00 pm.

The Members of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee are:-

Councillor Ovenden (Chairman)
Councillor Chilton (Vice-Chairman)

Cllrs. Blanford, Brooks, Burgess, Farrell, Hayward, Howard, Howard-Smith, Ledger, Meaden and Mulholland

Agenda

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| 1. | Apologies/Substitutes | |
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| | To declare any interests, which fall under the following categories, as explained on the attached document: | |
| | a) Disclosable Pecuniary Interests (DPI) | |
| | b) Other Significant Interests (OSI) | |
| | c) Voluntary Announcements of Other Interests | |
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| 3. | Minutes of the last Meeting | 3 - 8 |
| | To approve the Minutes of the last Meeting held on the 14 th February 2023. | |
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6 March 2023

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Agenda Item 2

Declarations of Interest (see also “Advice to Members” below)

- (a) **Disclosable Pecuniary Interests (DPI)** under the Localism Act 2011, relating to items on this agenda. The nature as well as the existence of any such interest must be declared, and the agenda item(s) to which it relates must be stated.

A Member who declares a DPI in relation to any item will need to leave the meeting for that item (unless a relevant Dispensation has been granted).

- (b) **Other Significant Interests (OSI)** under the Kent Code of Conduct relating to items on this agenda. The nature as well as the existence of any such interest must be declared, and the agenda item(s) to which it relates must be stated.

A Member who declares an OSI in relation to any item will need to leave the meeting before the debate and vote on that item (unless a relevant Dispensation has been granted).

However, prior to leaving, the Member may address the Committee in the same way that a member of the public may do so.

- (c) **Voluntary Announcements of Other Interests** not required to be disclosed under (a) and (b), i.e. announcements made for transparency alone, such as:

- Membership of amenity societies, Town/Community/Parish Councils, residents' groups or other outside bodies that have expressed views or made representations, but the Member was not involved in compiling or making those views/representations, or
- Where a Member knows a person involved, but does not have a close association with that person, or
- Where an item would affect the well-being of a Member, relative, close associate, employer, etc. but not his/her financial position.

[Note: Where an item would be likely to affect the financial position of a Member, relative, close associate, employer, etc.; OR where an item is an application made by a Member, relative, close associate, employer, etc., there is likely to be an OSI or in some cases a DPI. ALSO, holding a committee position/office within an amenity society or other outside body, or having any involvement in compiling/making views/representations by such a body, may give rise to a perception of bias and require the Member to take no part in any motion or vote.]

Advice to Members on Declarations of Interest:

- (a) Government Guidance on DPI is available in DCLG's Guide for Councillors, at https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/5962/2193362.pdf
- (b) The Kent Code of Conduct was adopted by the Full Council on 19 July 2012, and a copy can be found in the Constitution alongside the Council's Good Practice Protocol for Councillors dealing with Planning Matters. See <https://www.ashford.gov.uk/media/2098/z-word5-democratic-services-constitution-2019-constitution-of-abc-may-2019-part-5.pdf>
- (c) Where a Member declares a committee position or office within, or membership of, an outside body that has expressed views or made representations, this will be taken as a statement that the Member was not involved in compiling or making them and has retained an open mind on the item(s) in question. If this is not the case, the situation must be explained.

If any Member has any doubt about any interest which he/she may have in any item on this agenda, he/she should seek advice from the Director of Law and Governance and Monitoring Officer, or from other Solicitors in Legal and Democracy as early as possible, and in advance of the Meeting.

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Overview 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 February 2023**.

Present:

Cllr. Ovenden (Chairman)

Cllrs. Hayward, Howard, Ledger.

Apologies:

Cllrs. Burgess, Clarkson, Meaden, Mulholland.

In attendance:

Cllr Shorter

Deputy Chief Executive, Director of Customer, Technology and Finance, Head of Policy and Performance, Service Lead – Finance, Senior Governance & Data Protection Officer, Senior Member Services Officer.

Also in Attendance (virtually)

Cllr. Chilton (Vice-Chairman)

Cllrs. Blanford, Harman.

Director of Place, Space and Leisure, Assistant Director of Planning and Development, Assistant Director of Environment, Property and Recreation, Digital Transformation Manager, Policy & Scrutiny Officer, Policy and Democratic Services Assistant.

297 Minutes

Resolved:

That the Minutes of the Meeting of this Committee held on the 8th November 2022 be approved and confirmed as a correct record.

298 Report of the Budget Scrutiny Task Group

The Policy and Scrutiny Officer introduced the report that gave the final findings of the Budget Scrutiny Task Group. She advised that the Task Group had met four times during December and January to scrutinise the Council's draft 2023/24 budget and had made six recommendations to be made to the Cabinet and then to Council. Some of the particular areas of focus had been: - the Council's borrowing portfolio and expected interest rate increases; the HRA maintenance programme; homelessness and housing options; and risks around the maintenance of assets and the commercial property portfolio. Management Team had seen and supported the

recommendations and a summary of their advice was included at Paragraph 8 of the report.

The Committee considered that the Task Group had done a good job of scrutinising the budget as presented before Christmas, but given the information they had been made aware of at the pre-Committee briefing, there was a need to re-assess. There was also disappointment that this information had been introduced at a late stage. It was noted that any deficit for the upcoming year had been proposed to be supported by a one-off use of the Economic Resilience Reserve, and that position had not changed, neither had the issues, risks and savings targets identified within. However, there was concern about the newer proposal to not increase Council Tax by the maximum amount possible. Whilst it was agreed that residents should be supported, the actual amounts being talked about were pence per household, but would be significant for this Council in building budget stability going forward for future years. Therefore whilst the majority of Committee Members still considered the budget was sound and deliverable for 2023/24, it was questioned at what cost for the future? The Chairman said that the proposal on Council Tax was a purely political decision in the run up to an election and he did not believe it was in the best interests of Ashford Borough Council. Other Members agreed with this viewpoint.

A Member said he had had concerns throughout this process about “savings to be identified”. During the last budget cycle around of a third of the savings proposals identified had not been delivered and he therefore continued to disagree that the draft budget was “sound and deliverable”.

The Portfolio Holder for Finance, IT and Digital said that with regard to the savings, the draft budget report had stated that there would be an exercise to identify savings for future years during 2023/24. That work had been programmed and planned and a large amount of work had already been done. Within that exercise Management Team had identified some clearly identifiable savings that could be delivered during the forthcoming budget year (approximately £200k). He acknowledged and agreed that in the past budget savings had been identified and not delivered, and he believed Officers had learned from that and the ability to deliver and monitor savings going forward would be improved.

There was a discussion around the investment strategy of the Council, which was originally brought in to compensate for reducing Government support grants. The Chairman considered that such commercial investments should be making a difference to the residents of Ashford, above and beyond basic Council services and this had to go hand in hand with the Council charging a level of Council Tax that covered the costs of the basic services it provided. Keeping Council Tax levels low may be admirable, but if they did not keep up with the real cost of providing those services, the Council was then relying on commercial investments, where income could go up as well as down, and this would pose a risk to the budget. He did not believe therefore that income from investments, or “windfalls”, should be relied upon to “prop up” the budget.

As a result of the additional information received at this late stage, the Committee agreed to make four further recommendations, in addition to those made by the Task Group.

Resolved:

That the Committee agrees the following recommendations from the Overview and Scrutiny Budget Task Group to the Cabinet:

- I. The Council's draft budget for 2023/24 is sound and deliverable (noting recommendation II).**
- II. The Task Group supports the proposal to use reserves to fund the 2023/24 deficit.**
- III. The Task Group notes that in order to mitigate against the challenges presented by the current economic climate, a savings strategy needs to be developed to bridge the budget gap.**
- IV. The Task Group note that work should be undertaken to assess the Council's estates portfolio to determine whether assets should be retained.**
- V. Resources should be allocated to ensure the Council continues to deliver more than the minimum requirement of 10% for fire safety checks in homes.**
- VI. A presentation is provided to the wider Council regarding the Housing Revenue Account.**

The Overview and Scrutiny Committee then wanted to make further recommendations to the Cabinet, namely that:

- VII. The Committee approve the findings of the Budget Scrutiny Task Group at the time of writing.**
- VIII. That consideration should be given to increasing the Council Tax levels in line with Government recommended levels to protect service delivery in the coming and future years.**
- IX. The Committee would like to monitor the delivery of the proposed savings identified on an ongoing and regular basis.**
- X. £500,000 is earmarked from the Economic Resilience Reserve to safeguard against expected income from the international development company not being forthcoming.**

299 Final Report of the Overview and Scrutiny Task Group's Review of the Planning IT System Delivery

The Policy and Scrutiny Officer introduced the report which advised that last year the Committee had agreed to form a Task Group to review the lessons learnt during the project to deliver the new Planning IT System with Arcus Global. The Group also wanted to ensure that where issues had been experienced they were not repeated

for future transformation projects. The Task Group had made eight specific recommendations. Management Team had seen and supported the recommendations and a summary of their advice as an appendix to the report.

Resolved:

That the following recommendations from the Task Group be endorsed and forwarded to the Cabinet:

- I. Projects of a certain size or importance require a professional project manager and this role should not be in addition to normal duties.**
- II. Unnecessary and historic data should not be transferred to new systems and any data migration should be considered during the early stages of a project. A data retention policy should be agreed and adopted for implementation in the project.**
- III. Internal and external user testing should be thoroughly scoped, agreed through PMG and carried out for any future system implementation or upgrade.**
- IV. Detailed scoping of Officers time should take place when considering project resources.**
- V. Consultation with external customers should take place at the outset of a project to inform its delivery.**
- VI. PMG should determine the governance arrangements of future projects, including frequency of highlight reports setting out key risks and challenges.**
- VII. Portfolio Holders should be kept informed of project updates for key projects in their Service on a regular basis, which is defined from the outset of a project.**
- VIII. System rollouts should foremost be designed to improve the customer experience and processes need to be mapped with this in mind.**

300 Corporate Performance Report (Quarter 3 2022/23)

The Senior Governance & Data Protection Officer introduced this item which summarised performance against the Council's updated suite of KPIs reflecting the Corporate Plan 2022-24, for the Quarter 3 period 2022/23. The report pulled the necessary information from across Council services to reflect the quarterly KPIs. Representing these in the four themes of the Corporate Plan: - Green Pioneer; Caring Ashford; Targeted Growth; and the Councils underlying principles. In addition to the surrounding narrative for specific KPIs where available, the report also highlighted some of the key actions over the quarter where relevant to the aims and objectives of the Corporate Plan. Specific areas to note this quarter were the impact of the cost of living and inflation increases were having on residents and the

Council's budget, Town Centre vacancies, the focus on Housing, the awarding of a new waste and recycling contract and improved practices in Planning.

Resolved:

That the report be received and noted.

301 Report Tracker

Resolved:

That the Report Tracker be received and noted.

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ASHFORD
BOROUGH COUNCIL

Report To: Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Date of Meeting: 14 March 2023

Report Title: Ashford Community Safety Partnership: an update on community safety activity in the borough 2022/2023

Report Author & Job Title: Laurel Niven
Community Safety and Resilience Team Leader

Alison Oates
Safety and Wellbeing Manager

Portfolio Holder: Cllr Paul Bartlett

Portfolio Holder for: Safety and Wellbeing

Summary: This report provides the Overview and Scrutiny Committee with the community safety annual update. The report pays particular regard to the council's statutory obligation to work in partnership to reduce crime and disorder, this work being progressed through the Ashford Community Safety Partnership (CSP).

The report details crime statistics for the borough and its positioning against other districts within the county. Ashford is shown as being a safe borough as the level of recorded crime remains low, and there has been a reduction in many crime types, including serious violence offences. The report highlights an overall decrease in reports of anti-social behaviour.

The report, which is highly positive, demonstrates the value of multi-agency working and the encouraging results that can be achieved through effective information sharing, joint decision making and coordinated activity. It shows how the partners use a wide range of approaches to reduce crime and disorder to tackle community safety issues that matter to the local community.

Information is provided on current community safety priorities, actions that have been taken to meet those priorities and raises awareness of emerging issues. The activity presented also supports delivery of the Police and Crime Commissioner's Police and Crime Plan (Making Kent Safer 2022 to 2025).

Key Decision: NO

Significantly Affected Wards:	All
Recommendations:	The committee is recommended to note the information contained in this report and support the proposed priorities for 2023/24.
Policy Overview:	The Overview and Scrutiny Committee is designated as the committee responsible for Crime and Disorder under the Police Justice Act 2006.
Financial Implications:	Ashford Community Safety Partnership receives a grant from the Police and Crime Commissioner and this is used to fund small community projects within the borough.
Legal Implications:	Not applicable
Equalities Impact Assessment:	Not required
Other Material Implications:	None
Exempt from Publication:	No
Background Papers:	None
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Agenda Item No. 4

Report Title: Ashford Community Safety Partnership: an update on the community safety activity in the borough 2022/2023

Introduction and Background

1. It remains a statutory requirement for local authorities to work in partnership to reduce crime and anti-social behaviour (ASB). We achieve this through the Community Safety Partnership (CSP), where 'responsible partners', namely the local authority (district and county), Fire and Rescue Service, Integrated Care Board, Probation and Police, work collaboratively to make communities safer, reduce crime and the fear of crime, reduce ASB and work with businesses and residents on the issues of most concern. In addition to the statutory partners the CSP is also supported by representation from several other relevant organisations, for example, the chair of the Head Teachers Forum, Ashford College, the Department of Works & Pensions and chairs of the CSP subgroups such as the Ashford Domestic Abuse Forum.
2. To set the current priorities, the CSP used police, district and county data and the local crime profile. A stakeholder engagement event assisted in the development of priorities for 2022/23:
 - Tackling violence
 - Tackling domestic abuse and sexual offences
 - Tackling ASB and concerning behaviour
 - Tackling gangs and county lines

These are explored in detail in the next section of this report.

3. CSPs are responsible for convening a strategy group of all responsible authorities (although it can invite other organisations), preparing a strategic assessment of local crime and community safety priorities using information provided by partner agencies and the community, and produce an action plan to meet those priorities. Due to the nature of this requirement, the council's Community Safety Unit (CSU) takes responsibility for coordinating activities and events.
4. Under the Crime and Disorder Regulations 2007, district and borough CSPs are required to:
 - Produce an annual strategic assessment
 - Produce a rolling partnership plan setting out priorities, with actions to deliver these priorities
 - Have a dialogue with communities to inform these processes and explain outcomes
5. Ashford's actions throughout 2022/23 flow from the annual strategic assessment undertaken in consultation with relevant stakeholders. The actions are informed by the Kent Community Safety Partnership Plan and Safer Kent 2022 – 2023, the plan of the Kent Police and Crime Commissioner.

6. Overall, the CSP is responsible for ensuring that the identified priorities, actions and targets will be delivered through a multi-agency approach by having:
 - Strong strategic management
 - Tasking joint resources through well-established partnership operational structures, including identifying, managing and reducing risk
 - Strong performance management
7. CSP governance has two key decision-making levels; strategic and operational.

Our approach

8. The CSP has a whole system approach to tackling crime and ASB. Experience identifies that more than one type of intervention is needed to resolve the problem. For example, enforcement is most effective if local communities support it and other activity is taking place to change behaviours.
9. A variety of interventions are applied when looking at any type of crime or anti-social behaviour issue that requires the engagement of a range of services, voluntary and community groups to find long-term solutions.

Tackling anti-social and concerning behaviour – lead agency Ashford Borough Council

10. All residents have the right to feel safe and secure where they live and the right to enjoy peace and quiet in their homes and communities. The CSP is committed to effectively tackling anti-social and concerning behaviour which can have a serious impact on wellbeing.
11. The ASB, Crime and Policing Act 2014 defines ASB as: “Conduct that has caused, or is likely to cause, harassment, alarm or distress to any person, or conduct capable of causing nuisance or annoyance to a person in relation to that person’s occupation of residential premises, or conduct capable of causing housing-related nuisance or annoyance to any person”.
12. A range of enforcement actions will be used against those responsible for ASB. Working closely with the Police and other enforcement bodies ensures enforcement action is appropriate, proportionate and can be escalated swiftly where the need arises. The approach is to intervene early and undertake positive interventions to change behaviours before matters lead to a criminal offence being committed.
13. The Council’s ASB policy and supporting documentation are due to be reviewed this year and we will be working closely with internal departments and external organisations to complete this to ensure the requirements under the legislation in tackling ASB are met.

ASB - Kent Police data

14. The data provided by Kent Police indicates the number of incidents of ASB reported to Kent Police for the Borough of Ashford.

15. As can be seen in the table below there has been a decrease across Kent of 12,779 reported ASB incidents over the past 12 months. In Ashford the number has decreased by 991.
16. Appendix A provides the ASB figures for all districts, this can be used to benchmark Ashford against other Kent districts. It shows that we have the 7th lowest recorded ASB in the county.

Area	December 2020 to November 2021	December 2021 to November 2022	Increase / decrease in numbers	% increase / decrease
Ashford	2886	1895	-991	-34.4% (decrease)
Kent	41,184	28,405	-12,779	-31.3% (decrease)

17. Data provided by Kent Police as shown below highlights the three wards within Ashford borough with the highest recorded ASB:

Ward	January 2021 to December 2021	January 2022 to December 2022	Difference (numbers)	Difference (percent)
Victoria	689	608	-81 (decrease)	-12%
Aylesford and East Stour	233	129	-104 (decrease)	-45%
Furley	176	87	-89 (decrease)	-51%

18. This illustrates a decreases in all of the wards listed above. Victoria ward still has the highest levels of reported ASB within the borough. This is expected due to the nature of the ward (town centre and Victoria Park)

ASB - Borough Council data

19. In addition to the police data, the borough council recorded 227 incidents in the year to December 2022, a decrease of 42% compared to the previous year.

	Jan 2021 to Dec 2021	Jan 2022 to December 2022	Difference (numbers)	Difference (percent)
Ashford	389	227	-162	-42 (decrease)

20. Reports of ASB into Ashford Borough Council are received via several methods. The most common mechanism is via the council's website where there is an option to 'Report ASB'. This allows the reporter to complete an online form with details of issues they are experiencing. The online form is automatically sent to the relevant email inbox for the officer to investigate.

21. To encourage reporting and meet the needs of residents, the 'Report It' app has been widely promoted as another platform available to use and is managed in the same way as the web link.
22. The reports received cover a number of different types of ASB but the highest types were gathering of nuisance youths, nuisance vehicles and the third highest was harassment.

Use of ASB legislation (Anti-Social Behaviour Crime and Policing Act 2014)

23. Public Space Protection Orders (PSPOs) are designed to reduce and address ASB being committed in a public place. All of the live orders within the borough are available on the council's website. If the order is breached, police and council officers can issue a fixed penalty notice (FPN) to the value of £100. There are currently six PSPOs within the borough (three are gating orders, and three are linked to specified locations and particular behaviours). In 2022, a total of four FPNs were issued by Kent Police. They were in relation to breaches of the PSPO for the consumption of alcohol, begging and nuisance vehicles. Two of the FPNs were paid and two were withdrawn.
24. All PSPOs must be reviewed on a three yearly basis and subject to public consultation. The council has recently carried out a consultation for the renewal of the Coney Bear/Torrington Road site which took place in December. No objections or recommendations for change were received and it was therefore renewed for another three years. Details of this PSPO and others in the Ashford borough can be found here: <https://www.ashford.gov.uk/your-community/community-safety/anti-social-behaviour-asb/public-spaces-protection-order>.
25. Ashford Borough Council's CSU successfully took the Ashford MX (off-road race track) organisers using the Cloverleaf roundabout to court. The case was heard on 15 July, where the individual was found guilty of failing to comply with a Community Protection Notice. The individual failed to attend court and was fined over £3000. The CSU is now working closely with both the Legal and Planning departments concerning the next steps surrounding further enforcement work. This includes gathering evidence regarding a timeline of the events that have taken place and looking at what action can be taken about any enforcement against the landowners themselves.
26. Community Protection Warnings (CPWs) were issued to two individuals in May 2022 by Kent Police in conjunction with Ashford Borough Council concerning an ongoing neighbour dispute and impacts on the wider community matter.
27. Over the year, Kent Police have utilised their powers under the ASB, Crime and Policing Act 2014 to positively respond to incidents and concerns. Dispersal areas have been implemented under Section 34 of the act on 22 occasions. Most of these relate to preventing ASB in and around the town centre. A total of 27 CPWs were issued, with ten requiring escalating to Community Protection Notices (CPNs). Fourteen relate to town centre and anti-social behaviour, where criminal offences have been identified, arrests have been made, and bail conditions imposed to prevent further offending. Officers have also proactively utilised the PSPO conditions to manage alcohol-related ASB. Kent Police also successfully obtained a civil injunction that imposed several conditions on a young person, which has been an extremely successful intervention.

28. These powers were used to respond to substantial car meets at the Ashford Business Park in Sevington. Two dispersal areas were implemented and a CPW was also issued to an organiser of these meets, alongside working closely with the landowner. These interventions have prevented any further incidents.
29. Following concerns around youth-related ASB and violence during the summer holiday, partners have instigated a new ASB strategy that sees Police, Ashford Borough Council and youth service providers adopt a shared and coordinated approach to tackling these issues. Engage, Explain, Encourage, and, where necessary, Enforce is utilised to achieve the shared objective of diverting young people from ASB and crime.
30. An aspect of the ASB strategy was delivered in the October half term and focused on the town centre. Post this event, further work and progress have been made in the organisation and mobilisation of the district youth service provisions to collectively respond to this issue in support of lead agencies for ASB and crime. Agencies delivered daily activities that increased positive guardians and maximised visibility and effectiveness by coordinating and communicating the most appropriate resource to lead in a location/ interaction to support the objectives. This new approach has received positive feedback from involved partners, young people and local businesses/ stakeholders.
31. A similar event took place in the February half term, which will see a shift towards focusing on youth services as opposed to previously being Police led enforcement of the issues. A similar approach is being explored to respond to the issues of violence and ASB where the public consumption of alcohol is a factor.
32. In 2022, Ashford Borough Council housing officers secured one closure order linked to ASB. The housing service continues to work in close partnership with Kent Police to reduce ASB and safeguard vulnerable residents in our communities.
33. Housing has also used Community Protection Warnings, Community Protection Notices and Fixed Penalty Notices to tackle anti-social behaviour in the community and traditional housing tools concerning the tenancy. They have served 22 Community Protection Warnings, 7 Community Protection Notices and 1 Fixed Penalty Notice. These were issued for behaviour concerning residents not keeping their dogs supervised and under control, fly-tipping and noise.

ASB action plan

34. The ASB working group with the support of the CSP have completed the following work:
35. An ASB case review occurs when an individual is unsatisfied with how their ASB has been addressed. There have been eight ASB case reviews this year, colloquially known as a Community Trigger. Four cases met the threshold for a community trigger, and a review meeting took place in April 2022 for one and the other in September 2022. The other four didn't meet the threshold because they were still under investigation when the trigger was raised.
36. The Safer Streets funding was agreed upon in October 2021, but due to the Home Office's stringent funding conditions the whole project spending had to be complete

by 31 March 2022. The grant enabled the following tasks to be delivered to reduce violence against women and girls within Ashford Town Centre but is also having a broader impact across the borough:

- Installation of four CCTV cameras in Edinburgh Road Car Park
- Installation of nine public space CCTV cameras in key locations such as the station underpass and Beaver Road
- Improved monitoring of CCTV cameras at Elwick Place by switching them to the council's monitoring centres platform
- Purchase and distribution of over £5k worth of safety equipment to the public
- Educational inputs to year six pupils around staying safe and healthy relationships
- Complete replacement of the Memorial Gardens fencing
- Creation of Safe Spaces and associated bystander training for staff who work within the town centre
- Additional APAC radios were purchased to improve connectivity for businesses and Safe Spaces
- Streetwise app development – over 5000 downloads so far and the app developer is in discussion with other boroughs due to its success in Ashford
- Improvements to the street scene through alleyway mirrors, litter picking equipment and pressure washer for Biffa
- Providing Ashford Street Pastors with a purposed vehicle, the first district mobile Safe Space. The vehicle supports the Street Pastors' activity in the night-time economy, allowing them to expand their operations to safeguard more vulnerable people

37. An advisory group has been formed from interested key stakeholders and members of the community to provide independent advice and support to the delivery and promotion of this project work.
38. In addition, larger alleyway mirrors were kindly purchased by Cllr Lyn Suddards for Taylor's Passage and have recently been installed by Aspire. Conversations are ongoing with Network Rail to improve lighting by Duck Alley and associated footpaths.
39. Two multi-agency meetings have taken place to discuss ASB in the town centre following several reports from both members of the public and businesses. The first was to examine the impacts on businesses, the Public Space Protection Order (PSPO), street drinkers, homelessness issues, nuisance youths and hot spot locations. Many partners were able to provide an update on matters affecting the town centre. These included Kent Police CSU, Kent Violence Reduction Unit (VRU), Sk8Side, Uprising, KCC Youth Workers, Ashford Partnership Against Crime (APAC), Ashford Street Pastors and various ABC departments: CSU, Homelessness Team and Licensing. Their information identified the two groups that are seen as the main problem – groups of nuisance youths and the street drinking community.
40. The second meeting was an opportunity to explain to businesses what is being done to improve the situation and define the ASB strategy that is being formed. Many businesses were invited to attend, including a number that had previously reported issues of concern. Representatives from County Square were also in attendance as they could speak for many of their tenants affected by youths and their anti-social behaviour.

41. The knife bin in Stanhope has been successfully relocated and can now be found near the Stanhope Hub building. A new knife bin has also been installed for the Kennington area and is located in Bockhanger Square. Both bins will be carefully monitored and emptied regularly by the Police. More details can be found in the press release at: <https://www.ashford.gov.uk/news/latest-news/knife-amnesty-bin-installed-in-kennington>.
42. The Street Work Forum started meeting again on a monthly basis from October 2022. The meetings which are chaired and managed by Sk8side Youth Group aims to coordinate local youth initiatives. The forum includes several different youth providers and is an opportunity to explore specific areas and individuals that have been highlighted as benefiting from potential engagement. A referral process is being created for any partner to refer into the process.

Tackling Domestic Abuse and Sexual Offences – lead agencies Ashford Borough Council, Ashford Domestic Abuse Forum, Kent Integrated Domestic Abuse Service (KIDAS) which includes Clarion and Rising Sun.

Domestic abuse and sexual offences action plan

43. It is recognised that domestic abuse is a serious and life-threatening crime that affects victims and their families, and the priority is that victims and any children are safeguarded from further abuse.
44. The Borough Council domestic abuse service, is managed by the Housing Options team but remains a vital part of our community safety work and requires the same level of multi-agency engagement alongside the other community safety priorities.
45. The Borough Council employs a full-time Domestic Abuse Co-ordinator post within the housing service and also provides funds annually in support of the Independent Domestic Violence Advisor (IDVA) service for Ashford via the KCC commissioned Kent Integrated Domestic Abuse Service.
46. In Ashford, Clarion hold the contract for delivering the IDVA service and already operates the women's refuge in the town.
47. Clarion is contracted as part of the commissioning contract "To facilitate and deliver coordinated, multi-agency access points in local communities across Kent to enable access to information and support". This is known as the One Stop Shop, which Ashford Borough Council supports.
48. The contract also states that Clarion is responsible for "Working with local partnerships, delivery and facilitation of therapeutic and supportive activities to promote independence and future healthy relationships". ABC previously coordinated this group work, such as the Freedom Programme and the Phoenix Programme, but Clarion has taken over delivery this year

Domestic Abuse Coordinator

49. The post of Domestic Abuse Co-ordinator was introduced to the Borough Council six years ago. Since then KCC has developed the Kent Integrated Domestic Abuse Service (KIDAS), which covers Kent and Medway and provides advice and

information on services for victims, friends and family, and perpetrators of domestic violence. All local authorities in the county contribute towards this cost.

50. The coordinator's main focus is to ensure that we are delivering the new duties under the Domestic Abuse Act, as well as take forward the Make a Stand campaign. This post is more customer focused than in previous years, having had a full review in the past year. In essence, the key aspects of the role includes:-
- To provide leadership with regard to the provision of services for those experiencing or escaping domestic abuse within the Borough of Ashford
 - To undertake any necessary client risk assessments and, where necessary, develop and implement safety plans as identified in the risk assessment
 - To coordinate all referrals for the Sanctuary Scheme, which is designed to help support those at risk of domestic abuse to remain in their own home and avoid the upheaval of homelessness
 - To coordinate and manage the Safe House in Ashford and ensure clients are offered the full wrap around support
 - To participate in and support the work of the Multi Agency Risk Assessment Conference (MARAC)
 - To initiate and maintain effective communication with partnership agencies across all sectors at regional and national levels, including participating in the newly formed Local Partnership Board
 - To take the lead in the Make a Stand campaign.

Domestic Abuse Services in Tenterden

51. Since July 2021, there has been a new walk-in service in Tenterden where victims of domestic abuse can liaise with support services in complete safety and anonymity at the community project known as EC30. This is currently under review as the feedback has indicated that this location needs to be more suitable. Other sites are being explored.

Working with Male Perpetrators

52. In October 2021, funds from the Police & Crime Commissioner made it possible for men from Ashford to participate in the Community Domestic Abuse Programme. This is a 27-week 'roll on/roll off' programme for men who wish to amend their previously abusive behaviour and make more positive relationships. This will be reviewed this year with a view to Ashford Domestic Abuse Forum (ADAF) supporting the programme if required.

Domestic Abuse One Stop Shop (OSS)

53. The Ashford OSS is a drop-in service for anyone affected, in any way, by domestic abuse where support, help and advice is given.
54. It is a free and confidential service provided weekly and no appointment is necessary. It continues to be an area for professionals to work together to provide a coordinated response to domestic abuse.
55. During the Covid-19 pandemic, figures were significantly lower than in previous years due to the restricted service.

56. For 2022 to end November a total of 167 people contacted the OSS face-to-face for assistance and 11 people contacted it virtually.

Support for Men suffering from Domestic Abuse

57. The OSS is a service men can utilise just as much as women and offers a place for them to get support and advice.

58. Dads Unlimited is an organisation that supports the emotional safety of men and those they care about through three key areas; supporting male victims of domestic abuse, supporting men with family separation; and supporting men's mental health. All of the services use an evidence-based, trauma-informed, person-centred approach. It is achieved through the provision of a family separation helpline, one-to-one mentoring advice, mental health support, peer-led support groups, education and social services liaison support, pastoral support, court support, and adult and child community activities.

59. Clarion (KIDAS provider) provide additional support for male victims and will be launching a training package for professionals to be able to utilise.

Domestic abuse action plan

60. A new action was devised in 2022, in line with the Domestic Abuse Act, and the main areas of focus are detailed below:

Priority 1: To provide a weekly drop-in service offering advice, support and assistance in Ashford.

Priority 2: To meet the demand for places on Freedom & Phoenix programmes.

Priority 3: Meeting the needs of children who experience domestic abuse.

Priority 4: Service mapping for partners to raise awareness of all services to other agencies, and members of the public.

Priority 5: Flee fund to ensure there are accessible monies to provide clients with essentials when wanting to leave their homes.

Priority 6: To ensure that the funding from KCC is allocated correctly

Priority 7: To ensure male victims of DA are provided the same service and appropriate signposting is carried out

Tackling Violence– Lead agency Kent Police

Youth Related violence

61. Kent Police undertook a targeted operation in Stanhope with the support of the PCSO Problem Solving Task Force. This took place between February and May 2022. The team conducted initial surveys, with residents' feedback being the driver for activity. A multi-agency safer communities event was held, providing youth activities and signposting to other agencies and activities. An analysis of the operation's impact identified an overall 5.6% reduction in crime compared to 2021, a 33% reduction in the incidents reported to Police, which included a 64% reduction in the ASB linked to rowdy or nuisance gatherings in public.

62. A particular focus of the operation was to reduce catapult-related incidents. There was a noticeable reduction in reporting, which is also evident across the district. A range of measures was implemented to tackle this recurrent problem, including

proactive use of powers such as CPWs and Acceptable Behaviour Agreements (ABAs), along with focused inputs to the 1200 year six pupils during Safety in Action to raise awareness of the risks.

63. The operation also aimed to reduce the impact of county line drug activity and associated serious violence. During the operation, county line activity was reduced, and there were no incidents of serious violence. Kent Police assisted Moat Housing in obtaining a civil injunction on a tenant. This was effective in preventing drug-related activity in and around the property. Whilst the operation has ceased, there continues to be a reduction in observed ASB, drug-related activity and associated serious violence in Stanhope.
64. Monthly District Contextual Safeguarding Meetings continue to bring partners together to reduce the risk associated with adolescents – as individuals, groups, and places frequented.
65. There have also been three Complex Adolescent Harm processes where specific cases are raised to manage risk and identify interventions and diversionary options.
66. Three referrals by the Police have been submitted to the Charlton Athletic Mentoring Scheme and 29 young people have or are currently being supported by this project. These referrals include young people who have been identified as carrying weapons and committing serious violent offences.
67. The Police Cadet programme is available to young people aged 13 to 17 who live in Kent, irrespective of background or financial circumstances, including those vulnerable to crime or social exclusion. The cadets undergo training and participate in voluntary work with the police in their local community. They develop essential life skills and enhance opportunities for further education, training and employment – whether within the police service or another profession. The Ashford Cadets have continued to expand significantly over this year. They have been working in the community with the CSU on several projects, including weapon sweeps, County Square Pop-up shop and bike marking.
68. Working with the Violence Reduction Unit (VRU), five at-risk young people agreed to wear a buddy tag. This is offered to young people to assist them in diverting away from criminality or reducing the risk of exploitation. It has effectively reduced young people's vulnerability to becoming involved in county lines.
69. During the course of the year the Violence Reduction Unit have organised a street theatre event focusing on knife crime education that was attended by over 100 local school children. The commando chef once again visited Ashford in February engaging with two of the district's schools with over 200 pupils benefiting. The VRU knife pledge has also been rolled out to The John Wallis Academy and Homewood School with others following in 2023.

Violence against Women and Girls

70. Kent Police held a public engagement meeting in October 2021 to provide information to residents on the work Kent Police is doing to tackle violence against women and girls and to listen to the local community's concerns. Partners supported this event, including Ashford Borough Council, Street Pastors, Neighbourhood Watch and Stagecoach (providing free transport). It was a well-attended event; other events,

including seven 'walk and talks' through the town centre, have taken place over the last year. This has supported the delivery and promotion of the Safer Streets project and provided an opportunity to listen to the concerns of women and girls living and visiting the district. In July, following a request from local businesses, Kent Police and Ashford Borough Council licensing officers provided input to 25 local workers at the Elwick Club, giving safety advice, briefing on the Safer Streets project and providing personal safety equipment.

71. The Borough Council's Licensing Officer has been working with the Night-Time Economy businesses to promote the "Ask Angela"¹ campaign and there have been dedicated Police patrols working in conjunction with partners including the Street Pastors to increase visibility in the Night-Time Economy. The Street Pastors have been successful in recruiting more volunteers to support their work and Safer Streets funding was able to assist in the purchase of a vehicle to become the district's first 'mobile safe space'. This has expanded the ability and scope of the Street Pastors to act as visible guardians in the night-time economy protecting vulnerable people from being exposed to harmful situations.
72. The collective work and focus of agencies has been successful in gaining the support of businesses to promote the Safe Spaces campaign, and has also seen proactive responses from both businesses and their staff in identifying and intervening in situations where vulnerable females were at risk.

Reducing Violence in the Night-Time Economy

73. Safer season operations have had a continued focus on the night-time economy with dedicated foot patrols during peak times. Interventions with offenders have included the imposition of bail conditions to prevent re-offending. Key events, including the Queen's Jubilee and subsequent public holiday periods associated with the Queen's passing, had a planned increase in policing presence in the night-time economy. The Qatar World Cup presented a unique challenge around its scheduling for the night-time economy, with a focused policing approach and close liaison with licensees; few issues were reported.
74. Close working with APAC has led to several exclusions being issued to perpetrators of violence within the night-time economy; a powerful tool for businesses to send a message to those intent on violence that it is not acceptable and has consequences.
75. The Ashford Street Pastors provide additional visibility and assist Police and Ashford Monitoring Centre (CCTV) in identifying situations that can escalate into violence. The number of Street Pastors has increased significantly this year, and training has been provided to local officers to improve working relationships.
76. The Best Bar None scheme, which recognises quality operating standards within the licensing community, was formally launched in November, with six venues being the first to be presented with the award by the Mayor of Ashford. Ashford CSP is one of the first in the County to successfully roll out the scheme, with one of the key aims being to deliver a drive to increase the quality of standards across the industry. The successful recipients were:
 - Ashford Club – also recognised as the highest scoring venue

¹ The 'Ask for Angela' campaign provided a secret code for women to find help if they were feeling unsafe on a night out. ['ASK FOR ANGELA' IF YOU ARE FEELING UNSAFE - National Pubwatch](#)

- Cameo – also recognised for excellence in promoting public safety
- Tap Room
- The County Hotel
- Truckstop
- Valerie's

Reduction in Gang and Serious Crime related violence

77. Working in conjunction with the Kent Police County Lines Team and Chief Constables Crime Squad a number of county lines networks have been disrupted.
78. Intensification activity (Op Sceptre) has involved weapon sweeps and multi-agency visits to vulnerable residents at risk of cuckooing and exploitation. There have also been many joint operations at Ashford International Station with British Transport Police and passive drug dogs resulting in some arrests with drugs and weapons seized.

Building community capacity and increasing public confidence – Lead agency Ashford Borough Council

79. It is known that often communities are best placed to tackle their own issues and key to the work of the CSP is building sustainable community capacity to enable this.
80. It is also vital to the work of the Partnership to ensure the services meet the needs of all communities, particularly the most vulnerable such as victims of hate crime.
81. There is also a need to ensure that the perception of crime within the borough reflects the reality of crime and it is known that this requires sustained community leadership and ongoing conversations and effective communications.

Building community capacity action plan:

82. The CSP has completed the following work in relation to this priority:
- We have continued to fund Charlton Athletic Community Trust (CACT) for another year to provide diversionary activities, one-to-one mentoring and crime reduction workshops.
 - The re-energised Ashford Partnership against Crime (APAC) has increased membership in the “Pubwatch” and “Shopwatch” schemes. APAC supports the flow of information between premises and partners, ensuring key individuals are refused entry and public safety is maintained.
 - In January 2020, the CSP received £27,000 from the VRU to develop and deliver two community engagement projects within the borough to engage young people and reduce crime and ASB in these locations. The company (C3 Collaborating for Health) has delivered the project in Bockhanger ward and Beaver ward and the associated action plan will be implemented later in 2023.

Crime Data

83. The following tables show overall crime data for the Borough compared to other districts within Kent.

Total published all recorded crime

84. The table below shows that Ashford has seen a **slight decrease** in all recorded crime.

	November 2020 to October 2021	November 2021 to October 2022	% change	No change
Ashford	10,800	10,182	-5.8%	-618
Canterbury	14,587	13,407	-8.1%	-1180
Dartford	12,187	11,251	-7.7%	-936
Dover	10,396	9486	-8.8%	-910
Gravesham	11,059	10,059	-9.1%	-1000
Maidstone	15,454	13,540	-12.4%	-1914
Medway	30,739	27,488	-10.6%	-3251
Sevenoaks	7956	7093	-10.9%	-863
Folkestone and Hythe	9589	8906	-7.2%	-683
Swale	14,491	13,291	-8.3%	-1200
Thanet	17,063	15,156	-11.2%	-1907
Tonbridge & Malling	8208	7554	-8%	-654
Tunbridge Wells	7497	6778	-9.6%	-719
Force	170,026	154,191	-9.4%	-15,835

Most Serious Violence (e.g. actual bodily harm & grievous bodily harm)

85. The table bellows demonstrates that Ashford has seen no change in the offences linked to the most serious violence. Ashford has the fifth lowest most serious violence volumes comparable with Tunbridge Wells, Tonbridge, Sevenoaks and Folkestone and Hythe.

	November 2020 to October 2021	November 2021 to October 2022	% change	No change
Ashford	63	63	0	0
Canterbury	117	105	-10.3	-12
Dartford	72	88	+22.2	+16
Dover	82	74	-9.8	-8
Gravesham	77	94	+22.1	17
Maidstone	110	96	-12.7	14
Medway	226	247	+9.3	+21
Sevenoaks	45	57	+26.7	+12
Folkestone and Hythe	58	72	+24.1	+14
Swale	149	131	-12.1	-18
Thanet	142	143	+0.7	1
Tonbridge & Malling	45	55	+22.2	10
Tunbridge Wells	44	58	+31.8	14
Force	1230	1283	+4.3	53

Possession of Weapon Offences

86. Possession of weapon offences has **increased**; however, this is attributed to the proactive work by Kent Police linked to tackling violence and gangs.

	November 2020 to October 2021	November 2021 to October 2022	% change	No change
Ashford	62	80	+29	18
Canterbury	96	118	+22.9	22
Dartford	79	95	+20.3	16
Dover	69	93	+34.8	24
Gravesham	87	93	+6.9	6
Maidstone	100	128	+28	28
Medway	236	269	+14	33
Sevenoaks	44	69	+56.8	25
Folkestone and Hythe	95	121	+27.4	26
Swale	86	111	+29.1	25
Thanet	136	156	+14.7	20
Tonbridge & Malling	45	61	+35.6	16
Tunbridge Wells	37	68	+83.8	31
Force	1172	1462	+24.7	290

Shoplifting

87. Shoplifting has **increased** within the borough. This is attributed to very low figures due to retail premises being closed throughout 2020 and 2012 due to the pandemic.

	November 2020 to October 2021	November 2021 to October 2022	% change	No change
Ashford	630	867	+37.6	237
Canterbury	842	1088	+29.2	246
Dartford	1124	1523	+35.5	399
Dover	381	516	+35.4	135
Gravesham	447	564	+26.2	117
Maidstone	749	989	+32	240
Medway	1618	1916	+18.4	298
Sevenoaks	538	479	-11	-59
Folkestone and Hythe	456	625	+37.1	169
Swale	938	1111	+18.4	173
Thanet	662	1208	+82.5	546
Tonbridge & Malling	447			
Tunbridge Wells	438	646	+47.5	208
Force	9270	12173	+ 31.3	2903

88. Therefore, the data shows that Ashford is one of the safest boroughs in Kent to live, work and visit.

Police and Crime Commissioner grant to the CSP

89. The 2022/2023 the PCC grant to Ashford CSP totalled £31,744. The funding was split in the following ways:
90. Freedom Leisure for an employment skills project totalling £2,680. This was a 6-week course entailing 2 hours per week of employability skills and work experience placement. This will assist with making the candidates more desirable to hirers. Once the course is complete, candidates are reviewed and could be enrolled on the apprenticeship programmes resulting in lasting qualifications or supported in their employability endeavours elsewhere. They organised weekly physical activities, which allowed for socialising outside of the work placement whilst supervised in a safe environment. Activities will be varied and include gym, fitness classes and multi-sports.
91. Ashford Mediation Service, 'Keep Ashford Talking phase 2' - £15,980. This project consists of two aspects: A pilot project within local schools and youth groups to equip staff, mentors and young people with basic mediation and negotiation skills which can be deployed should they find themselves in a dispute or conflict. They have identified schools and youth groups to collaborate with and a targeted project to work in wards with the highest deprivation and ASB incidents, disagreements and disputes (Aylesford Green, Stanhope and Victoria). The project will work with community leaders to support individuals in resolving their differences before they escalate and further intervention by the police is required. By raising awareness that free mediation services are accessible, they hope to actively engage community members to choose mediation services instead of escalating conflict. This will be done through a localised media campaign and engagement with key community stakeholders and local service providers.
92. Sk8side Safety Project - £6485 The project has six strands:
- Delivery of two detached evening sessions in the Town Centre: Current ASB trends will determine the times of delivery. Team members will engage with young people who are socialising in the town, building relationships with those unknown to the team and engaging with those that are known. With the young people, they will work on what activities would engage and interest the groups whilst challenging current behaviour and attitudes.
 - The facilitation of the Street Work Forum (SWF): This forum brings together those agencies explicitly working in a street-based environment. The SWF discuss all current street-based work and the identified hot spots. Between the agencies, they will deliver projects in ongoing areas of need and work together to respond to hot spots.
 - Holiday Town Centre Youth Café
 - Safer Streets for Young Women Workshops: Sk8side will run various workshops/programmes on the ABC Safer Streets initiative. This will include safety awareness for young women, including the provision of safety equipment. They will run workshops (for which we will also take referrals) with young men about their role in ensuring the streets are safe for young women.
 - Diversionary activities: Reduction in funding generally since the pandemic has resulted in Sk8side being able to offer fewer diversionary activities. They would ensure that more programmes can be provided, particularly in holiday times. This would also ensure requests from young people identified through the street work and holiday café can be responded to.

- Drug & Alcohol Programme: They would like to build up a range of resources to target those young people currently engaging in substance misuse. Programmes will be run in outdoor and cafe environments.
93. Youth Unity - £3880 Delivering Outreach Sessions in partnership with Ashford Community Safety. Community Information Gathering and Mobile Creative Music / Podcasting for Ages 12-16 years. As well as a series of 1 hour 15 minute 'Say No, to Violence and Drugs and other forms of exploitation' (Josh's Story), Primary Need to Know classroom sessions for Transition Stage 9-11 years old.
 94. Personal Safety Equipment - £2630 to support the event run by the CSU and to support the initiatives surrounding violence against women and girls.
 95. Renewal of PSPO Signs in the Town Centre - £180. This is to support the work surrounding the ASB strategy as mentioned above.
 96. Uprising UK - £740. This is to offer Panna Football for youth within the Town centre during the February Half Term.

Other Community Safety Events

97. Safety in Action occurred at Ashford Fire Station between 20 and 28 June. The event saw important safety messages delivered to Year 6 pupils throughout the borough via various workshops covering anti-social behaviour, fire safety, mental health, drugs and alcohol and first aid. Nearly 1,200 young people attended and the feedback received was highly positive. This event was organised by Ashford Borough Council's Community Safety staff.
98. Events have taken place within Victoria Park, Stanhope and Tenterden to offer street theatre to the public on the topics of peer pressure, knife crime and the impact this has on the family. The Violence Reduction Unit (VRU) funded these events. The events were shown on BBC South East News.
99. A multi-agency meeting took place at McDonalds in the town centre to discuss ongoing ASB issues. An initial meeting was held in February where recommendations were made that at first were successful, however, the management have since reported certain young people continue to be an issue. ABC CSU and the Police will maintain close and regular contact with the establishment to monitor the situation and enforce where necessary.
100. As a partnership we hosted an event on 29th April that included the Police and Crime Commissioner, Mr Scott, and Ashford MP, Mr Green, where there were presentations on the work achieved under the Safer Streets 3 project. That evening a multi-agency team were out promoting the new initiatives to the public visiting the town centre's night-time economy. This received a lot of positive feedback and further events have been organised in the town over the summer period.
101. On 25th May, the council hosted A Sporting Chance update event at Ashford Picturehouse. This allowed Charlton Athletic Community Trust (CACT) to showcase the work they had completed within the borough over the previous nine months, utilising the funding from Ashford Borough Council, Police and Crime Commissioner and the Premier League. A highlight of this work is that they have mentored 29 young people at the highest risk of exploitation or criminal involvement and have made

positive changes to their lives. The Trust has also delivered county lines” awareness sessions to 900 secondary school pupils.

102. The ‘Safer Summer’ initiative took place in Ashford town centre during summer. It occurred on 1st July, 20th July, 29th July, 10th August and 26th August. It consisted of a multi-agency approach to ASB issues, offering a visible presence and handing out safety equipment purchased as part of the Safer Streets initiative. Kent Police, ABC CSU, Licencing and Ashford Monitoring Centre supported the event.
103. The Safer Autumn Event took place week commencing 26 October. This was an opportunity to work with Kent Police and other partner agencies during the half-term week in the Ashford Town Centre area to engage with businesses and members of the public to listen to concerns and show partnership working and a visible presence. The CSU attended daily sessions with help from youth support workers, Sk8side, AMC and Catch 22, amongst others. Hotspot areas such as Lower High Street, Memorial Gardens, McDonald's, Park Mall and County Square were visited on several occasions during each session, which ran from 15:00 (considered a busy period). Opportunities were taken to engage with young people, listen to what provisions they want, and signpost to youth provisions within Ashford.
104. On Friday 2 December, Ashford Town Centre hosted the latest Op Sparham - a road policing operation arranged by Kent Police Road Safety Unit in partnership with divisional officers and partner agencies. Ashford Borough Council joined various agencies, including Ashford Community Policing Team, Ashford Town Team, East Kent Special Constabulary, Rural Task Force and the DVSA. Many vehicles were brought into the stop site situated on Henwood Industrial Estate, in addition to several other stops on the roads of Ashford. As a result, several offences were noted and dealt with including a drug-drive arrest, nine vehicle seizures under 165 of the Road Traffic Act and 24 Traffic Offence Reports for various matters
105. Kennington's neighbouring policing week of action took place following reporting of ASB in the Kennington area increasing. It included an incident where a bus was targeted, as well as other local businesses being affected. Agencies and Kent Police have worked closely with Stagecoach and the affected businesses. Patrols have taken place on and around key bus routes to reassure passengers and the public. Further multi-agency work was carried out, including:
 - Action in speed enforcement; education to motorists, including e-scooters.
 - Hawkeye; police CCTV van at various locations across Kennington and advertised via My Community Voice and Neighbourhood watch for public engagement.
 - A specialist Domestic Abuse investigator was out for people to speak to for support, advice and guidance anonymously.
 - High visibility patrolling of officers and PCSO's across the area in vehicles and on foot
 - Weapons sweep in public spaces, schools engagement presentations at Goat leas and Phoenix Primary schools.

CSP priority setting process and identified priority areas for 2022/23

106. In January 2023 the CSP came together to agree the approach to be taken for priority identification in this year. Building on feedback from this Overview & Scrutiny meeting, the intention is to agree formally the priorities for the CSP at its next meeting in March 2023.

107. The following have been identified as potential priorities:

- Tackling violence with a focus on violence against women and girls
- Tackling domestic abuse and sexual offences
- Tackling ASB and concerning behaviour
- Tackling Serious and Organised crime

There will be a cross cutting theme of substance misuse.

108. Phase 2 will involve a deeper analysis of crime types relevant to these priorities in order to examine who is being affected or perpetrating the crimes, locational analysis at ward level and temporal analysis. This will enable the CSP to focus on the crime/problem having the most impact on the borough and have the data to drill down to exactly whom the crime/problem is affecting, when and where.

109. Phase 3 will feed all of this information into the rolling action plan process. Partnership interventions can then be designed based on this and will ensure its investments and activities will achieve the most positive impacts possible. Not only will the strategic assessment inform the rolling plan but it will also be the basis and rationale behind commissioning/grant making decisions moving forward.

110. A sub-group of the CSP will take responsibility for the delivery of each priority identified by the strategic assessment and rolling action plan. They will take the top-level action plan, build and develop it into a full, SMART action plan and ensure delivery against it.

111. The action plans created by the sub-groups are approved by the CSP and progress against them is assessed when it meets (which is three times a year). The Performance Group is responsible for monitoring progress against our key crime and fear of crime indicators, following on from sub-group intervention.

Conclusion

112. Ashford's Community Safety Partnership only exists because of the significant support given by its individual partners and by those from a whole range of organisations who are dedicated every day and night to protecting our community. The work of the partnership continues to have a positive impact on crime reduction and also inspiring confidence within our communities to report crime or ASB.

113. There has been a number of changes in the community safety arena over recent years and this has shown a change of working for most partners involved in the CSP. This report hopes to recognise this work and thank everyone involved.

Portfolio Holder's Views

114. We are committed to improving the quality of life for those living and working within our communities and in providing a safe and secure environment to enable people to live together. We work closely with Kent Police towards our communities becoming free from the negative impact of crime and ASB. The council continues to play an important role in coordinating the Community Safety Partnership and its priorities by enabling strong multi-agency work. This annual report demonstrates the work that can be achieved and I would like to thank all those involved for their hard work and dedication.

Cllr Paul Bartlett
Portfolio Holder for Community Safety and Wellbeing

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Appendix A

Kent wide ASB figures

Area	December 2020 to November 2021	December 2021 to November 2022	Difference (number)	Difference (percent)	Position in County (highest to lowest)
Ashford	2,886	1895	-991	-34.3%	7
Canterbury	3,725	2501	-1224	-32.9%	Joint 3
Dartford	2,564	1813	-751	-29.3%	8
Dover	2,124	1781	-343	-16.1%	9
Folkestone and Hythe	2,456	1684	-772	-31.4%	11
Gravesham	2,969	1984	-985	-33.2%	6
Maidstone	3,765	2497	-1268	-33.4%	5
Medway	7,151	5065	-2086	-29.2%	1
Sevenoaks	2,050	1094	-956	-44.6%	13
Swale	3,414	2501	-943	-26.7%	Joint 3
Thanet	4,239	2770	-1469	-34.7%	2
Tonbridge and Malling	2,048	1686	-326	-17.7%	10
Tunbridge Wells	1,636	1134	-502	-30.7%	12
Kent	41,027	28,405	-12622	-30.8%	



Agenda Item No:	5
Report To:	Overview and Scrutiny Committee
Date of Meeting:	14 February 2023
Report Title:	Safeguarding Annual Report
Report Author & Job Title:	Alison Oates Safety and Wellbeing Manager
Portfolio Holder	Cllr. P Feacey
Portfolio Holder for:	Member Champion for Safeguarding

Summary: This report provides the Overview and Scrutiny Committee with the council's annual safeguarding update. The report pays particular regard to the council's obligation to work in partnership to protect children, young people and adults at risk from abuse or neglect, preventing impairment of their health and development.

It gives information on the safeguarding activity, including support to National Safeguarding Adults Awareness Week and improvements to our internal training and safeguarding webpages.

It also supports the delivery of the priorities set by the Kent Safeguarding Children's Multi-agency Partnership (KSCMP) and the Kent and Medway Safeguarding Adults Board (KMSAB).

Key Decision:	No
Significantly Affected Wards:	All wards
Recommendations:	The committee is recommended to note the information contained in this report.
Policy Overview:	The Safeguarding Policy was reviewed in September 2022 and is available on the Council's website. The council has both a moral and legal obligation to ensure that all children and adults at risk are protected and kept safe from harm. Safeguarding is relevant to the council's current corporate plan and draft Corporate Plan 2022-24 i.e. the Caring Ashford priority theme.
Financial Implications:	There are no additional budget implications resulting from this report.
Legal Implications:	The Children Act 2004 specifies what is required of local authorities relevant to making arrangements to safeguard and promote the welfare of children. The Care Act 2014 codified the principles of wellbeing and placed safeguarding

adults' duties on a statutory basis. The council's policies and procedures are governed by this Act, which provides the legal framework of how local authorities (Kent County Council – KCC) and other parts of the public sector, including Ashford Borough Council, should protect adults at risk of abuse or neglect. The production of an annual report forms part the council's measures to meet its safeguarding responsibilities.

Equalities Impact Assessment:	Not required for this update report
Data Protection Impact Assessment:	Not applicable
Risk Assessment (Risk Appetite Statement):	Not applicable
Sustainability Implications:	Not applicable
Other Material Implications:	No additional staffing implications result from the review however, additional support for the council's Safeguarding Lead Officers (SLOs) is acknowledged as necessary.
Exempt from Publication:	No
Background Papers:	Not applicable
Contact:	alison.oates@ashford.gov.uk – Tel: (01233) 330225

Report Title: Safeguarding – annual report

Introduction and Background

1. This report covers the period January 2022 to December 2022 and includes:
 - An update on the council's safeguarding policy
 - Accountability and governance arrangements
 - Actions taken
 - Referral update
 - Training update
2. Safeguarding continues to have a high profile with significant political and media focus nationally as well as locally.
3. The Children Act 1989 states that the child's welfare is of paramount importance and that every child has the right to protection from abuse, neglect and exploitation. Statutory guidance on making arrangements to safeguard and promote the welfare of children under Section 10, 11 and 13 of the Children Act 2004 specifies what is required of local authorities.
4. The Care Act 2014 codified the principles of wellbeing and placed safeguarding adults' duties on a statutory basis. The council's policies and procedures are governed by this Act, which provides the legal framework of how local authorities (Kent County Council – KCC) and other parts of the public sector, including the borough council, should protect adults at risk of abuse or neglect.
5. The Counter-Terrorism Act 2015 dictates that all local authorities are vital to the Prevent work, which exists to reduce the risk of people being drawn into terrorism, while under the Modern Slavery Act 2015 the council has a statutory duty to report and provide notification to the National Crime Agency about any potential victims of modern slavery or trafficking.
6. Together, these legislative provisions place stringent responsibilities on local authorities and their partners regarding the general safeguarding of both children and adults at risk.

Ashford Borough Council's Safeguarding Policy

7. The council's Safeguarding Policy stipulates that an annual review will be undertaken each September by the Safeguarding Lead Officers Group. This was completed in September 2022.
8. The policy was brought up to date and aligned with recent changes in national policy, along with best practice from around the county. It also emphasised the collaborative work being undertaken across the council, reflected local working arrangements with the relevant statutory partners and refreshed the referral process flow chart.

9. The council's Management Team approved the revised version of the Safeguarding Policy in November 2022 with all associated documents being updated on the council's website and staff SmartHub.

Accountability and Governance

10. Ultimately, accountability for safeguarding as relevant to the functions of the borough council falls to the Chief Executive. The Chief Executive and Management Team are responsible for ensuring that the council's responsibilities and procedures are implemented, monitored and consistently reviewed.
11. The Designated Safeguarding Officer (DSO) is responsible for dealing with reports and concerns about the protection of children, young people and adults at risk appropriately and in accordance with the authority's Safeguarding Policy. If the DSO is unavailable the Deputy DSO (DDSO) can respond, or one of the Safeguarding Lead Officers (SLOs).
12. A Safeguarding Lead Officers Group was established in 2016 and continues to support the DSO. This is an operational group with representatives across the council with key skills and knowledge who can support the council to meet its responsibilities. SLOs are assigned to the following areas:
 - Adults at Risk
 - Children at Risk, including Child Sexual Exploitation
 - Domestic Abuse
 - Prevent (preventing extremism)
 - Modern Slavery and Human Trafficking
 - Contracting
 - Training
13. All borough councillors, employees and volunteers are responsible for carrying out their duties in a way that actively safeguards and promotes the welfare of children, young people and adults at risk. They must also act in a way that protects them from wrongful allegations of abuse as far as possible, bringing safeguarding concerns to the attention of the DSO or in their absence to the Deputy DSO.

Actions taken

14. SLOs meet at least quarterly to deliver key improvements in the council's safeguarding governance, policymaking, procedures, working practices, training and monitoring arrangements.
15. SLOs review recent Domestic Homicide Reviews (DHRs), Safeguarding Adult Reviews (SARs), Serious Case Reviews (SCRs) and Local Child Safeguarding Practice Reviews (LCSPRs) to see if any of the lessons learnt or recommendations have an impact on the work of the council and its working procedures. In addition to this Kent Community Safety Partnership hosts various DHR Lessons Identified Webinars, which relevant officers attend.

16. The council's Management Team receives six-monthly safeguarding reports for strategic review, operational oversight and to cascade information through the organisation.
17. In March 2022 the Modern Slavery and Human Trafficking Statement was refreshed. This statement sets out the steps that the borough council will undertake to ensure there is a collaborative approach across the organisation.
18. Ashford Borough Council continues to operate its Telecare service, which has recently been rebranded to Lifeline Anytime and provides a 24-hour service, giving an instant response at the touch of a button. This service allows our customers to live independently for longer.
19. In May 2022 the council completed the Kent and Medway Safeguarding Adults Board (KMSAB) annual agency report. All KMSAB partner agencies are required to complete this document annually regarding safeguarding activity that took place in the previous calendar year (April 2021 to March 2022). These reports are peer reviewed at the Quality Assurance Working Group and are made available to the Board and Business Group Members.
20. In July 22 we completed the KMSAB thematic statutory self-assessment on self-neglect and hoarding which was subsequently peer-reviewed at the end of August 2022. The peer review panel agreed with our assessment with the exception of two areas: (1) our safeguarding training needs to incorporate the Mental Capacity Act (this has now been added into the Level 2 safeguarding course), and (2) that we need to review our involvement with hospital discharges that are linked to our tenants. This has been allocated to the DSO to progress with the opportunity to work with the two Ashford Volunteer Centre Care Navigators who are based at the William Harvey Hospital.
21. Section 11 (S11) of the Children Act 2004, places a statutory responsibility on key agencies and organisations to make arrangements to ensure that in discharging their functions, they have regard to the need to safeguard and promote the welfare of children. S11 compliance is a mandatory.
22. The statutory S11 self-assessment questionnaire comprises of 52 questions for each return. It is broken down in to the following 8 sections:
 - Senior management commitment to the importance of safeguarding and promoting children's welfare
 - A clear statement of the agency's responsibility towards children is available to all staff
 - A clear line of accountability within the organisation for work on safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children
 - Service development takes account of the need to safeguard and promote welfare and is informed by the views of children and families
 - Staff training on safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children for all staff working with or in contact with children & families
 - Recruitment, vetting procedures and allegations against staff
 - Interagency working
 - Information Sharing

23. The latest return was completed by the DSO in September 2022 and sent to the Kent Safeguarding Children Multi-Agency Partnership (KSCMP) for peer review and analysis.
24. Each response to the 52 questions is RAG rated and after the peer review on 19 October 2022 the council received the following score:

Category	Number
Red (Criteria not met)	0
Amber (Criteria partially met)	2
Green (criteria met)	43
Not applicable	6

25. The feedback from the peer review was positive with just a few minor additions to be added to reassure the KSCMP that our requirements are fully met. These amendments were made and submitted on 3 November 2022. The peer review panel advised us there were a lot of positives in our audit and thanked us for taking the time to complete it.
26. National Safeguarding Adults Awareness Week took place between 21 and 27 November 2022. This is a national event that is hosted by the Ann Craft Trust and that encourages councils, health providers and other organisations to raise safeguarding awareness with the aim of empowering members of the public to act when they are worried about the welfare of another person, or indeed are experiencing abuse/neglect themselves.
27. The theme of the week was 'Responding to Contemporary Safeguarding Challenges' with each day focusing on a different strand; these were:
- Monday – Exploitation and County Lines
 - Tuesday – Self-neglect
 - Wednesday – Creating Safer Organisational Cultures
 - Thursday – Elder Abuse
 - Friday - Domestic Abuse in Tech-Society
 - Saturday & Sunday – Safeguarding in Everyday Life
28. Ashford Borough Council was keen to promote awareness of safeguarding and supported this week of action with the public, staff and members in a variety of ways that included:
- Comms messages via social media and the SmartHub
 - A display in the Customer Contact Centre, with topical posters and various leaflets available
 - A display in the One You Shop
 - Providing information to the Welfare Intervention Officers and Domestic Abuse Co-ordinator for relevant clinics and events
 - Presentation to the Independent Living Schemes; this was deferred due to sickness and an alternative date sought
 - Leaflets in different languages. Those in relevant languages were also provided to the Refugee Resettlement Centre
 - Face-to-face events in the Town Centre; these were joint events with the police. The public were able to speak to ABC officers and the

police, as well as receive information and merchandise (which was provided by the KMSAB).

29. There is continuing engagement with the County's Channel Panel to assess and support those who may be vulnerable to being drawn into terrorism. Channel uses existing collaboration between partners to support individuals and protect them from being radicalised.
30. The Assistant Director Contest and Serious Organised Crime (SOC), KCC has a standard agenda item at the Ashford Community Safety Partnership meetings; this includes a yearly update on the Counter Terrorism Local Profile (CTLP) in respect of Ashford.
31. Ashford Domestic Abuse Forum has continued to work closely with the council's Domestic Abuse Coordinator to offer a service to all victims of domestic abuse. The One-Stop-Shop, which offers a weekly drop in facility, re-opened in December 2021 for face-to-face sessions (following being closed due to Covid-19 restrictions) and continues to offer support to those in need. There is also a multi-use facility in Tenterden where specialists are available once a month to give support and advice and which has resources to deal with emergencies as and when they arise.
32. A Neighbourhood Housing Officer attends the twice-monthly Multi-agency Risk Assessment Conference (MARAC) meetings to continue to safeguard adults and children from domestic abuse. These meetings continue to be held virtually following on from the format used during the pandemic.
33. The DSO attends the Local Children's Partnership Group and provides input and support for their priority areas.
34. The safeguarding pages on the staff SmartHub have been developed to provide additional information. This section has been made more user-friendly and additional information has been added. The new areas include Deprivation of Liberties (DOLs), Domestic Homicide Reviews & Serious Child Reviews with direct links to the lessons learned, as well as information on the Emotional & Mental wellbeing of children, the Care Act, Advocacy, Self-neglect & hoarding, Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) and more. These changes build on the recommendations made following the safeguarding self-assessments around raising awareness of those areas.
35. The District Safeguarding Lead Officers group identified that all districts were recording their referrals in different ways. Therefore, a proposal was submitted to KCC for the development of a software solution that could be utilised across Kent and Medway. KCC have now developed the Safeguarding Reporting System and have covered the first year's annual licensing fee. This is excellent news and means the cost to districts and boroughs will only be an ongoing annual fee which will be found within existing service budgets. This system was implemented on 12 December 2022.

The electronic safeguarding system will ensure:

- There is a robust process so that districts are able to effectively manage the record of a safeguarding concern.
- District councils in Kent have a standardised way to submit and review safeguarding referrals.
- There is a secure and efficient way to share safeguarding data amongst multi-agency partners. It also enables safeguarding officers to pick up records when a person moves from one district to another.
- Actions are able to be clearly assigned and monitored.
- There is a clear view of the districts' reporting statistics, including the ability to monitor trends across each individual district, which will save time for designated safeguarding leads.

Referral update

36. Between 1 January 2022 and 31 December 2022 the council recorded 23 referrals from officers concerning an adult or child/children; this is a decrease of 15 reports as compared to the same period last year. The majority of referrals are linked to adults and are reviewed as part of the Safeguarding Lead Officers meetings. It is worth noting that there has been an increase in self-neglect related cases (this is also a county trend). The Safeguarding Adults Team Service Manager attended the SLO meeting on 12 December to discuss the KMASB updated Self-Neglect and Hoarding Policy, as well as some examples of complex cases housing officers are dealing with.
37. All referrals are recorded and monthly reviews are conducted by the relevant lead officer to ensure that the matters have been addressed.

Referral Group	1 Jan to 31 Mar 2022	1 Apr to 30 Jun 2022	1 Jul to 31 Sep 2022	1 Oct to 31 Dec 2022
Adult Social Care	3	3	5	2
Adult Vulnerability Panel	0	0	0	1
Children - Referral to Front Door	2	5	1	0
Domestic Abuse	1	0	0	0
Total	6	8	6	3
No of months	3	3	3	3
Average per month	2	2.66	2	1

Training

38. The authority is currently 88% compliant for Level 1 Safeguarding training (e-learning) and 54% compliant for Level 2 training (virtual face-to-face). The Level 2 compliance level is lower than last year. This lower level of compliance is mainly a consequence of the training for many members of staff all expiring at the same time. An additional course was added to the training programme but take up was low. Further courses are being arranged and it is noted that the March course date has been fully booked. Management Team are strongly encouraging relevant staff to book on (and attend) the courses.

39. A process is in place to ensure managers and staff are reminded to book their training once it falls due. If an officer fails to complete their training, after three reminders have been issued, their manager is then notified to take appropriate action. For level 2 learning, officers receive a notification 9 months before expiry – this gives them two opportunities to attend a course. These are held every March and September. Many officers have waited until their training has expired though before looking to attend training. We need to ensure that officers book on to a course and attend it prior to expiry of their current certification.
40. Officers are able to attend continuous development courses based on safeguarding subjects on a regular basis which are facilitated by the KSCMP. These also tend to be free of charge.
41. The DSO is now trained to deliver the following courses:
 - KSCMP Basic Child Protection course
 - KSCMP Child Safeguarding for Designated Practitioners
42. Ashford Borough Council members are able to access safeguarding training course: [Safeguarding Children and Adults at Risk 2021 \(learningnexus.co.uk\)](http://learningnexus.co.uk)

Conclusion

43. Ashford Borough Council believes that ‘safeguarding is everybody’s business’ and is committed to ensuring any children, young people or adults at risk are protected from abuse and are provided with opportunities to thrive.
44. As this report shows the last 12 months have been busy with a number of audits, peer reviews and complex cases being managed by the DSO and our SLOs.
45. It should be noted that all SLO roles are undertaken on a volunteer basis, on top of their substantive duties and that without their dedication and commitment this important work would not happen. As the Designated Safeguarding Officer, I would like to personally thank them for their continued support.

Portfolio Holder’s Views

46. This year has brought unprecedented safeguarding challenges from the pandemic recovery and cost of living crisis. Our strength has come from working closely with our multi-agency partners supporting each other to ensure safeguarding and protecting the most vulnerable within our community is given the priority it both morally and legally deserves.

Cllr Peter Feacey
Member Champion for Safeguarding

Contact and Email

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Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Report Tracker – March 2023

Current Work Programme			
Report Title	Date due to O&S	Reporting Service	Scope of what is to be scrutinised
Freedom Leisure Contract	Date TBC	Environment, Property and Recreation	<p>A report to review the council's new leisure operator. Scrutiny of this topic would examine how the service has been running, the savings made to the council and the levels of customer satisfaction with the service.</p> <p>Note: An internal audit of the contract is underway and a report could come to O&S after the audit process has been completed.</p>
Monitoring of Savings Schedule	Date TBC	Finance, IT and Digital	It was recommended by the Budget Scrutiny Task Group for O&S to monitor the delivery of the proposed savings identified on an ongoing and regular basis.
Consultation and Engagement Review – Recommendations Update	June 2023	Policy and Performance	A report will be shared to provide an update on the recommendations from the Consultation and Engagement review.
Annual Sickness Report	Summer 2023	HR, Customer Services, Communications and Digitalisation	A report providing the Committee with annual sickness information for the recent year.
Annual Performance Report	Summer 2023	Policy and Performance	A report to outline the council's performance and achievements during the last year.
Overview and Scrutiny Annual Report	Summer 2023	Policy and Performance	Annual report of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee outlining work carried out by the Committee in during the last year.

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