

MAIDSTONE BOROUGH COUNCIL

Communities, Housing and Environment Committee ACTING AS THE CRIME AND DISORDER COMMITTEE

MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON TUESDAY 24 SEPTEMBER 2019

Present: Councillor Mortimer (Chairman), and
Councillors M Burton, Joy, Kimmance, Mortimer,
Powell, Purle, D Rose, M Rose and Young

Also Present: Councillors Brindle, Mrs Gooch, McKay,
Perry, Round and Vizzard

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

It was noted that apologies for absence had been received from Councillor Khadka.

2. NOTIFICATION OF SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS

It was noted that Councillor Kimmance was substituting for Councillor Khadka.

3. URGENT ITEMS

The Chairman informed the Committee that he had agreed to take Councillor Purle's Call for Action as an urgent item, which could be found on the Amended Agenda.

4. NOTIFICATION OF VISITING MEMBERS

It was noted that Councillors Brindle, Mrs Gooch, McKay, Perry, Round and Vizzard indicated that they wished to speak on Item 11 – Serious, Violent and Organised Crime in Maidstone.

5. DISCLOSURES BY MEMBERS AND OFFICERS

There were no disclosures by Members or Officers.

6. DISCLOSURES OF LOBBYING

Councillors M Burton, Mrs Joy, Mortimer, Powell and D Rose stated that they had been lobbied on Item 11 – Serious, Violent and Organised Crime in Maidstone.

7. EXEMPT ITEMS

RESOLVED: That all items be taken in public as proposed.

8. MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 19 MARCH 2019

RESOLVED: That the minutes of the meeting held on 19 March 2019 be approved as a correct record and signed.

9. PRESENTATION OF PETITIONS

There were no petitions.

10. QUESTIONS AND ANSWER SESSION FOR MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC

There were no questions from members of the public.

11. SERIOUS, VIOLENT AND ORGANISED CRIME IN MAIDSTONE

The Chairman informed the Committee that the agenda item would start with a presentation from the Police and the Community Protection Manager which would include a couple of videos to provide context to the subject matter. He requested that the Committee took a strategic look in terms of the content of the presentation, but also take into account the local perspective.

The witnesses contributing to the meeting were asked to introduce themselves to the Committee:-

Kent Police - Chief Inspector Ray Quiller and Inspector Mark Hedges

Ilsa Butler Manager from One Maidstone which heads the Business Improvement District for the town centre

Dan Bride, Assistant Director for North and West Kent Adolescent Services and Head of Youth Justice Services in Kent

The Community Protection Manager, in introducing the report, stated that the presentation would provide some context and real life experiences surrounding the issues highlighted in the report which included an introduction to the new Kent Police Violence Reduction Unit funded by the Home Office. It would also give an update on the state of serious, violent and organised crime within the Maidstone area.

Members were also informed that the role of the Serious Organised Crime Panel (SOCP) would be explained, together with context around the 4 P approach which was adopted by the SOCP and what is meant by disruption activities. The presentation would culminate in providing evidence on how knife crime was being tackled, including reporting and intelligence sharing to provide a solution to this problem and would look at how the Police are working with partners to tackle domestic abuse.

Chief Inspector Quiller gave a brief history of his 20 years career in the Police and advised that Kent Police had recently been graded as outstanding and that illustrated how hard the Force worked to maintain and constantly improve the service they provided to the public and had a long and proud tradition of bringing offenders to justice.

He thanked Councillors and Officers for their support in keeping the district safe and outlined various initiatives that had been introduced, particularly in regard to intelligence gathering and CCTV deployment.

Crime in Maidstone

Inspector Hedges presented the crime data comprising of 2018/19 and 2019/20 (financial years).

The Committee noted that the Police had been recording their data differently since 2018 and therefore it would not be possible to provide comparisons with previous years as they would not be like for like. Therefore the current data can only be prepared to last year.

Highlights included that overall Crime in Maidstone was down by 6.1% which equated to 400 less victims. Serious Violent Crime was down to 8.3%, with violent crime down by 8.1% and Public Order offences were down by 36.5% and Robbery incidences down by 31.4%

However, the number of possessions of a weapon were up by 13.5%, Drug Offences were up by 83.7%

Maidstone's Community Safety Plan 2019-2022

The Committee were reminded of the priorities set within the Community Safety Plan 2019-2022 which were:-

- Protecting our communities against serious and organised crime (including modern-day slavery)
- Reducing the harm caused by domestic abuse (including stalking)
- Keeping children and young people safe
- Safeguard people whose mental health makes them vulnerable
- Reduce the impact of substance misuse on our community

Perception

The Committee heard that perception is key to making us feel unsafe or vulnerable. This was illustrated by the type of language used and how we use it and the impact it has on young people.

Social media has its part to play in keeping to the facts, not retweeting unsubstantiated information or opinions which become the reality in people's minds. Using words like 'knife crime' would make a young person fearful and they would carry a knife themselves to feel 'safe'.

Just because a few young people congregate and wear hoodies, does that make them a gang? The perception is that this is gang but it's their behaviour and activities that define them, not what they look like.

Definitions of Groups

It was felt important that there was a clear definition in the way that the Police and others refer to gangs, for example:-

Peer Group - A small unorganised, transient grouping but are not motivated by crime.

Street Gang – A predominantly street based group of young people who see themselves and are seen by others as a discernible group for whom crime and violence is integral to the group's identity.

An Organised Criminal Network – A group of individuals for whom involvement in crime is for personal gain. The gain is mostly measured in financial terms so crime is their occupation.

The Role of the Serious and Organised Crime Panel

Inspector Hedges explained to the Committee the role of the Serious and Organised Crime Panel who meet every 4 weeks with multi-agency partners. Their work involved tackling crime trends and clusters, county lines, human trafficking and modern day slavery offences, prison releases, top threat risk and harming people in the district and finally high risk offenders being managed in the community.

The Committee heard that the Panel tackle Organised Criminal Gangs through a partnership intervention (the four P's) which was:

Pursue – Relentless disruption and prosecution

Prevent – people becoming involved in SOC

Protect – reduction of the vulnerability amongst our communities from the threat of SOC

Prepare – ensure the necessary capabilities exist to tackle SOC

These principles were applied when dealing with organised crime groups. Currently Maidstone had two active serious organised and violent gangs in Maidstone.

The Community Protection Manager advised that knife crime nationally had increased, in an effort to decrease this, measures had been put in place in Maidstone which included 623 stop and search searches since April 2019 (an increase of 239%), over 300 of those were in the town centre and surrounding area. Numerous arrests for drug and possession of weapons had been carried out and 3 Section 60 Stop and Search Orders used in Maidstone since April 2019.

The Committee were advised that a lot of work had been done with the KCC Youth and Community Services around the narrative of knife crime, essentially about youths carrying knives for protection.

Other initiatives included the seizure of knives from secondhand stores, visits from Trading Standards to stores where knives are sold, visits to Schools to talk to pupils, staff and parents about the dangers of carrying

knives, carrying out surveys with young people about why they carry knives and increased Stop and Search.

Chief Inspector Quiller added that there had been a lot of positive and exceptional work being carried out by his Officers and partners following the tragic events surrounding the serious, violent incident in Jubilee Square recently.

A knife bar was being utilised in the town centre (particularly in areas such as Brenchley Gardens) and Officers were working with Nightclubs to see if a similar initiative could be incorporated in those establishments as well.

Domestic Abuse Awareness

The Committee was informed that domestic abuse was the silent killer as its not talked about as it's a personal thing and domestic abuse exists in silence. Initiatives had been introduced whereby professionals such as GPs, nurses and hairdressers are trained to be aware to the signs of domestic abuse when they come into contact with their patients or clients.

The Community Protection Manager explained that domestic abuse took on many guises such as controlling behaviour, physical and psychological abuse. It was noted that there was an increase of 20% in recorded crimes involving domestic abuse.

Work of multi-agencies was to ensure that victims had the facilities and ability to report incidents and the confidence to come forward. Although the number of incidents had risen this could be because victims were more confident about reporting it.

The Committee also heard about the role of the Domestic Abuse Forum which aimed to protect victims by ensuring they have access to the services they need and helped to prevent future incidents by improving understanding and ensuring young people enjoy healthy relationships.

An invitation to a Briefing on the work being carried out on Domestic Violence would be sent out to Members to make them aware of the one stop shop service, refuges and outreach services.

Adverse Childhood Experiences

The term Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACES) could be used to describe a wide range of stressful or traumatic experiences that children can be exposed to whilst growing up.

The experiences could be linked to adverse mental health conditions and low life survival.

The Committee heard about the work being undertaken by multi-agencies.

One Maidstone

Ilsa Butler from One Maidstone detailed the 'easy peas' trauma pack which was a first aid provision for the night-time economy. There would be a media campaign to illustrate where these first aid packs would be in the town centre.

The Committee commented that:-

- Section 106 contributions did not appear to be going towards youth services in the villages.
- The presentation was excellent and showcased the work of the multi-agencies.
- The statistics produced for the report differed from those set out in the Home Office report.
- Maidstone Mediation should be invited along to speak to the Committee about the work they do.
- Waiting times for mental health referral was appalling.

In response to questions from Members, Officers advised that:-

- There was a lot of Police presence in rural areas and to illustrate this, the Chief Inspector advised that around £370,000 worth of stolen property had been recovered this year alone and work had been carried out with farmers in relation to live stock worrying, fly tipping, burglaries, criminal damage, illegal caravans etc.

The Chairman suggested a section on rural crime for the next meeting of this Committee.

- The Met Police do liaise with the Transport Police regularly.
- The Police data has the highest accuracy rate in the country. They are recording more crime and are 96.6% accurate.
- That the figures collated and used by the Police were based on a financial year and the methodology used to collect the figures had been changed since 2018 following a problem identified with the accuracy of the figures. Therefore the comparison against this year's figures could only be compared with last year.
- The Police would be looking at other ways of sourcing data to illustrate performance including data around A and E Admissions etc
- A paper would be circulated to the Committee on population against crime figures.
- The Police were there very quickly when the serious crime incident happened in Jubilee Square and were able to make a lot of arrests

very quickly.

- Work around dispersal orders had been undertaken in Shepway on youths congregating outside the shops. The parents of the youths had been spoken to in an attempt to tackle the issue. Youth Services Teams had also been deployed in the area. In addition, community protection warnings could be given to the parents in regard to the behaviour of their children.
- When the next Strategic Assessment is produced, a more in depth conversation could be had on the crime statistics and trends.

RESOLVED: That

- 1) The report be noted and the work of the Safer Maidstone Partnership be endorsed to provide reassurance to Members, constituents and the public at large that Maidstone remains a place where they can feel safe and be safe.
- 2) A letter of thanks and support be sent from the Committee to the Urban Blue staff, the Ambassadors (Business Improvement District), the Street Pastors and the Gallery door staff in recognition of their efforts and bravery during and after the incident on 25 August 2019.
- 3) A Domestic Abuse awareness event is held; open to all Members, to help raise awareness of the services available to support victims, preventative and early intervention activities being delivered by the Safer Maidstone Partnership.
- 4) The Committee declares Appendix 1 to the report of the Head of Housing and Community Services incomplete on account that it presents a partial and incomplete analysis of crime and disorder in the Borough that fails to recognise a) substantial increase in crime and disorder afflicting the Borough in recent years, b) where increases are impacting, or c) the deteriorating position of Maidstone wards relative to the wider Kent Police Area.
- 5) The Council continues to work with other responsible authorities in the reduction of knife crime and domestic violence ensuring that the Police have every support.
- 6) The Committee **Recommends to the Licensing Committee** that it be asked to consider a review of its policy following the recent serious incident of concern which may include means for better security.
- 7) The Committee **Recommends to the Communities, Housing and Environment Committee** that a review is undertaken into the Council's use of its anti-social behaviour powers, including taking into consideration a) tightening the public space protection order (PSPO) to include a comprehensive ban on street drinking in the

town and b) preventing known offenders from returning to known crime and anti-social hotspots, for example Brenchley Gardens, Week Street, High Street etc.

- 8) That a Working Group be established, led by relevant Ward Members to examine the causes of crime and disorder in the rural wards to the south and east of the Borough, and to report to the Communities, Housing and Environment Committee on measures the Council might take and to the Crime and Disorder Committee on measures other responsible authorities might take, to address matters.

12. DURATION OF MEETING

6.30 p.m. to 9.55 p.m.