

CRIME AND DISORDER COMMITTEE

10 September 2019

Present:- Councillor Bentley, Councillor Bourne, Councillor Dundas, Councillor Hogg, Councillor McCarthy, Councillor Whitehead

Substitutes:- Councillor Hazell (for Councillor Davies), Councillor Willetts (for Councillor Bentley)

Also Present:- Councillor Lilley

17. Welcome and Announcements

In the absence of the Chair and Deputy Chair, the Committee elected a member to chair this meeting. Councillor Dundas was nominated by Councillor Hazell, seconded by Councillor Willetts and approved by the Committee.

RESOLVED that Councillor Dundas be appointed as Chairman for the ensuing meeting of the Crime and Disorder Committee.

18. Minutes of previous meetings.

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meetings held on 26 February 2019 and 22 May 2019 be confirmed as a correct record.

19. Safer Colchester Partnership

Councillor Hogg (by reason of being the trustee and license holder for a local charity) declared a non-pecuniary interest in the following item pursuant to the provisions of Meetings General Procedure Rule 7 (5). Councillor Bourne (by reason of being the Deputy Head of a local school, employed by Essex County Council) declared a non-pecuniary interest in the following item pursuant to the provisions of Meetings General Procedure Rule 7 (5).

Pamela Donnelly, Chair of the Safer Colchester Partnership and the Council's Strategic Director of Customer and Relationships, introduced the partners attending and thanked them for the work that their organisations carried out, and the systematic joint approach they had taken to community safety. The theme of the presentation 'Changing Landscapes' was introduced and explained. This theme stemmed from the ongoing environment of systematic change for public and voluntary sector service provision. The quality and depth of partnership working was extolled, as was the effect of collaboration and codesign on improving community safety and general public health and wellbeing.

Councillor Lilley, Portfolio Holder for Communities, Wellbeing and Public Safety, highlighted the amount of work which the Partnership had conducted over the past few years, and drew attention to the reduction, over time, in complaints and concerns regarding public safety.

The work of the Partnership was being expanded, to increase action against County Lines drug gangs and to protect young people from being drawn into gang activities.

Chief Inspector Rob Huddleston, Police District Commander, gave an overview of the pressures from the past year, which centred on stretched finances and fewer officers. More investment had now been received, with an additional 215 officers recruited so far this year, including an increase to Community Policing Teams across Essex of 68 new officers. It was explained that trainee officers underwent a further two-years of at-work training after Police college, before they were signed off as being ready to work independently.

Effective partnership with other agencies, including the Council, and the increase in resources available had meant that police operations could effectively cover both day- and night-time economies. The Town Team had grown, and the Rural Policing Team had also grown, going from three to ten officers, supported by Police Community Support Officers and conducting wider rural engagement activities. A business crime team was being drawn up to protect companies across Essex, and 20 new officers were to be recruited as Young-Person Officers to work with vulnerable children. 75 Special Officers had been working within the Police to assist with a diverse range of activities, from fraud prevention, to providing translation services. Stakeholders from across the Borough were being met with to ensure that all communities were being covered.

The District Commander described the work which had been carried out to tackle drug-related crime and knife crime. Operation Sceptre had targeted the use and carrying of knives and had proceeded alongside the work of Raptor Teams conducting operations targeting drug supply and crime, and alongside the Youth Offending Service.

Demand for Police responses had increased, and the Police were concentrating on maintaining a hostile environment for criminals in Colchester, prioritising issues and incidents by assessing threat, harm and risk in each case. In July 2019, the Police logged 33,841 calls via 999, an increase from 31,480 logged in July 2018. 28,205 non-emergency calls were received in July 2019 and the Police switchboard received around 58,000 telephone enquiries. An increase in recorded crime to 15.3% had been recorded, although it was noted that this was around 2% lower than the Force's average. One reason for this is that the Home Office had introduced new crime recording rules, which can see multiple crimes recorded for a single incident.

Demand has also increased for Police involvement in non-criminal incidents, such as suicide/self-harm cases and missing-person searches. This often involved working with the NHS and Social Care Services.

The District Commander explained the process for prioritising incidents and deciding responses, assessing threat, harm and risk for each incident and crime. The Police had worked with the Department for Work and Pensions, the Council's Neighbourhood Teams, Neighbourhood Watches, Military Police, town centre managers, businesses and others to target crime and criminals, and were also engaging with Essex University. Part of this work involved provision of victim support, and officers had worked with a range of partner groups and organisations to ensure training on this was of the best possible standard. Advice and communications had also been carried out to better-identify vulnerable individuals in need of support. One example was the provision of advice to taxi drivers as to identifying potentially vulnerable individuals who may need safeguarding. Victim Navigators had been employed to identify issues and help vulnerable people and victims of modern-day slavery and other long-term abuse to return to a more secure and positive place.

Police visibility continued to increase, with more officers and successful action by the Town Centre Policing Team and an increase in Rural area patrols. Providing an engaged and positive presence at community and civic events also helped to improve the Force's visibility.

Greg Keys, Group Manager for Essex Fire and Rescue Service (EFRS), detailed the Fire Service's refocussing of fire prevention work, moving away from centralised operations and concentrating on local arrangements instead. Operational crews had been tasked to help provide safety and engagement work, alongside external partners and community hubs. Local station managers were supporting local community safety groups. A programme to conduct fire safety visits every three months (where appropriate) had been instituted, and the Firebreak Project had targeted interventions regarding fire safety for young people (ten years old and upwards) and also promoting tolerance, team work and equality. This could be tailored to the needs of partner organisations, such as organisations working to promote law and order. 69 Firebreak courses were held during 2018-19. Home and school visits continued to be made, but new ways of engagement were being explored and used.

A gradual increase in the volume of emergency calls had been experienced, often involving road traffic accidents and rubbish/waste fires. Ways were being sought to minimise such incidents. The Group Manager did however stress that the call volume experienced remained lower than the national average for the Fire Service.

David Messam, Head of Probation (North Essex) at the National Probation Service provided an update on the evolution of probation service provision over recent years, with the resulting split between local probation service providers, and the National Probation Service. The National Probation Service provided advice to courts and parole boards, managed approved premises, delivered statutory victim services and supervised high-risk and sex offenders on probation. In May 2019, probation services were split into 12 distinct regions, with Colchester Borough within the East of England region, which includes Essex, Suffolk, Bedfordshire, Northamptonshire, Cambridgeshire and Hertfordshire. Surrey, Sussex and Kent had now moved to the South-Eastern Region.

Offender management had been moved to fall within the remit of the National Probation Service, with voluntary or private sector innovation partners commissioned to deliver accredited programmes and oversee unpaid work. The National Probation Service would continue to work closely with the Essex Community Rehabilitation Company and rely upon partner agencies. It was explained that offender management in custody has been refocussed towards offender managers based in prisons, rather than communities, to increase rehabilitation efforts in prison and thus reduce recidivism.

Jenny Gibson, Service Delivery Manager for Essex Community Rehabilitation Company (ECRC), explained the role played by the Company in managing low- and medium-risk offenders in Essex. Their team of officers managed a range of cases and delivered a suite of different types of interventions, alongside partner agencies. Issues such as domestic abuse, anger management and group work for 18-25-year-olds were focussed upon, and interventions were delivered based upon specific issues identified for each individual case. Work going forward included dealing with mental health issues, providing counselling and building a Women's Strategy, in partnership with Open Road. It was confirmed that, even with future changes expected, the Company's workforce had continued to grow, and interventions increased.

Nicky O'Shaughnessy, Director of Local Delivery for Essex County Council's Children and Families Service, detailed her organisation's existing working links with others in Colchester and highlighted the 'Outstanding' assessments given to the Service by OFSTED and the HMP Inspector of Youth Offending Services. This had only been possible due to the good working relationships between the Service and its partners, and Essex County Council had been the only local authority in the country to be awarded 'Outstanding' by both OFSTED and the Inspector.

Demand on early help and statutory services had increased, with pressure on families leading to an increase in poverty, homelessness, neglect, deprivation and exploitation. An increase in cases within traditional areas of concern included an increase in incidents of domestic abuse. Fewer critical cases had arisen, but there had been an increase in cases assessed as presenting a low- or mid-level of risk. Contextual safeguarding was being carried out by the unit dedicated to tackling violence and safeguarding of vulnerable individuals. A campaign to improve mental health and reduce self-harm or suicide had been carried out.

Cases of missing children were being addressed, with resources being allocated to help reduce the number of cases, in partnership with the Police and others. A range of useful forums were in place to help address serious problems such as child exploitation and domestic abuse. This joined-up approach meant that more funding could be gained.

Pam Green, Director of Transformation and Strategy for North East Essex Clinical Commissioning Group, presented the Group's update. The NHS had undertaken to move away from silo working in health-related matters, with significant changes being made since 2017. The lack of recent statutory changes had given an opportunity for more time to be spent developing partnership working in order to become one of the top-performing systems of integrated health provision. Examples of partnership working were given.

Wider issues affecting wellbeing were now being addressed, such as isolation, work patterns and lifestyle. Local financial stability had been used to improve the number of posts working in this area and included work in partnership with Sport England. The provision of advice and help to those with unhealthy lifestyles and pressures had been seen to have a positive effect.

Commencing the discussion, a member of the Committee questioned whether the Committee would prefer to receive opportunities to scrutinise the work of each statutory partner separately and whether this would allow for a more in-depth examination to be carried out of each partner organisation, better addressing the Committee's statutory duty to scrutinise. The Chair of the Safer Colchester Partnership explained that separate scrutiny had been carried out in previous years, but that the combined approach had been agreed with the Committee's Chair in order to take a more thematic approach. The Council's Monitoring Officer had confirmed that this approach fulfilled the statutory duties of the Committee. It was confirmed that the Scrutiny Panel had the right to request a separate Crime and Disorder Committee briefing from any partner organisation in the Safer Colchester Partnership. The Chair of the Safer Colchester Partnership committed to discuss this with the Assistant Director (Environment) and with the Chair of the Committee prior to the next Scrutiny Panel meeting.

Greater detail was requested regarding the four priorities for protection from hidden harms and how interventions were evaluated for success. Members of the Partnership explained that hidden harms included grooming, domestic abuse, harm to the vulnerable, honour-based crimes, child trafficking, sexual abuse and female genital mutilation.

The work of the 'Virtual Crew' programme was covered, providing online learning and guidance to school pupils regarding avoidance of hidden harms and a range of risks. It was explained that this was the successor to the 'Crucial Crew' programme and provided guidance in the same areas in which 'Crucial Crew' had been involved. The Chair of the Safer Colchester Partnership assured the Committee that statistics regarding the 'Virtual Crew' would be provided to Committee members as soon as these were ready.

The Committee remarked upon the evidence shown of an increase in positive partnership working, and a reduction in silo working. More integration had seemed to result in greater success for each partner. Cross-agency working had led to stronger bonds between partners, and benefits to communities across the Borough. The Partnership's representatives were asked to explain what happened regarding cooperative working when key individuals leave the organisations. Succession planning arrangements were detailed, with new officers brought in to continue local partnership working. The Chair of the Safer Colchester Partnership described the succession-planning and contingency provisions in place at the Council which would ensure continuity of operations.

The use of organisational terms of reference and co-defined principles at the strategic level to guide partnership work at the operational level was given as a key part of ensuring ongoing partnership working. Resilience in the system was therefore built-in, with colleagues briefed and ready to step in and continue when officers left their roles. The District Commander described the issue of frequent rotations within the Police and the resulting need for senior officers to keep their colleagues fully briefed in order to guarantee organisational resilience. Tracy Rudling of Community 360 briefed the Committee on succession planning and resilience measures at her organisation, extending to the provision of information to partner organisations, allowing them to represent the whole partnership in different forums, should this prove necessary or expedient.

A member of the Committee requested an update on what could be done to re-establish relations with the probation and community payback team and on funding options for community work within the Partnership. The Chair of the Safer Colchester Partnership explained that the Community Safety Partnership fund can be used for projects to improve the Partnership's work and that applications for this funding can be submitted. Members of the Committee were informed that Lisa Hobson, Community Safety and Safeguarding Officer, would be able to provide them with more information on this. The Service Delivery Manager for ECRC informed the Committee that a new manager of unpaid work was due to be appointed in order to oversee payback work. Councillor Hogg requested her contact details, and those of the team manager for the County Council's restorative justice programme, to discuss this further.

Concern over some experiences relating to waiting times for ambulances were raised by one member of the Committee. Assurance was given that ensuring an effective ambulance service was a key priority to all in the NHS. The priority scale used by the Ambulance Service to order the importance of calls was detailed. It was agreed that instances of over-target waiting times were unacceptable and that any instance of lengthy waiting time would need to be accurately reflected in the patient's notes.

The Partnership members were asked what measures were in place to tackle drug dealing, protect young people from involvement in the trade, and whether the Police were operating single-officer patrols. The District Commander gave an overview of the work of dedicated Raptor Teams targeting the drugs trade and liaising with the Metropolitan Police to tackle county lines drugs gangs. Covert assets were in place around Colchester and updates on public successes were given in the Police's social media presence. Single-officer crews were in operation, but back-up units were kept on-hand, and full personal protective equipment and training was issued to all officers.

Responses to petty crime were described, including the threat, harm and risk assessment which determined the incident priority, and the assessment of the chance of solving the crime. If no evidence were available, trained officers would commence desk-based investigation. Victim support measures were likewise detailed. The importance of people officially reporting incidents to the Police was stressed, rather than just raising them on social media. This led to questions regarding the geography of where incidents occurred and the incidents and policing of rural crime. It was stated that rural areas generally experienced relatively low crime levels, with the Council addressing antisocial behaviour and triaging more-serious matters to the Police. The main challenge for the emergency services was the size of the rural areas, and perception was often that minimal policing was carried out. The District Commander assured the Committee that this was not the case and that visibility of rural policing had been increased through daily activities and special events such as Rural Crime Week and by working with organisations such as Farm Watch. Across the Borough, the District Commander highlighted the need for good flows of information, such as from Neighbourhood Watches. Councillors in suburban areas were asked to identify areas of concern to which the Public Spaces Protection Order could potentially be rolled out. A member of the Committee requested that the Committee be provided with emergency services' response time statistics relating to rural and urban call-outs.

The Committee debated the difficulties surrounding how to deal with cases where perpetrators were also victims. The multi-agency support approach was explained, as used when perpetrators of crimes had been coerced into criminality. This approach covered victims of modern-day slavery, who had added protections from prosecution under law for crimes they were forced to commit. There was a duty to protect children from neglect and abuse and from criminalisation and a restorative justice approach was preferred over punitive action.

The correlation between the level of criminal incidents reported and the level of public interest in, and fear of, crime was probed. The Portfolio Holder for Communities, Wellbeing and Public Safety addressed this point, detailing work between the Borough Council, COLBAC (Colchester Business Against Crime) and the Police to tackle shoplifting and other town centre crime. Shops were being pressed to improve their safety and security measures. Reports of incidents from the Dutch Quarter had diminished, following work with resident groups. The District Commander informed the Committee that the increase in crime in Colchester was lower than the average national increase, and that August saw a drop in antisocial behaviour incidents reported by 322, compared to August 2018. In Colchester, it had been found that only 27% of residents thought that crime was a problem and it had been seen as a good sign that more minor crime was being reported, in place of more serious and harmful incidents. It was acknowledged that an increase in people reporting incidents would be positive, but that this would increase the statistics of crime and antisocial behaviour. The Committee were informed that, as an example of improvement in the Colchester area, that during a recent 'Night of Action' by the Police and partners, zero emergency calls were received for the Police on that Saturday.

The recent slight rise in incidents reported to the Fire Service was discussed. A 40% reduction in incidents had been recorded over the past decade, with some Fire Services no longer attending low-risk events, such as the triggering of automatic fire alarms. In Essex, a spike in incidents had been encountered in 2016, but the rise in incidents following that had been only of a few hundred per year. There had been a few thousand incidents where the Fire Service had provided ingress to other emergency services, and closer cooperative working had been achieved. Rural Fire Service provision was partly based on the use of on-call fire stations, and it was confirmed that these took time to assemble their crews, which did have an adverse effect on response times.

The Committee queried the differences between the set priorities for each member of the Safer Colchester Partnership, and specifically differences between the priorities of the Borough Council and the Police. The District Commander gave assurances that the Police's priorities were in accord with those of the Borough Council, and that these were not ranked in any order, but carried equal weight with each other.

The District Commander was asked about crime related to the University and explained that the University did not experience critical levels of crime, but did encounter spikes in incidents, such as when new students arrived. A key cause of incidents was that new undergraduates encountered a combination of new freedom and independence with a lack of experience. The Police had continued to work with the Student Union to ensure the safety of the student body.

The Committee requested that statistics be provided by the different parts of the Probation Services, such as data relating to recidivism and successful completions of probation. The Chair of the Safer Colchester Partnership committed to supply these to the Committee.

The Partnership Members were asked to confirm whether the 'Street Weeks' events would continue. The Police District Commander informed the Committee that there had been no evidence of long-term improvements from these events, with short-term improvements dissipating within less than a week. The Police had switched their approach away from Street Weeks and more towards sustainable engagements and more-visible events, such as the Stadium Fun Day, MAD Days organised by Colchester Borough Homes, and community and civic events, which allowed officers to be approachable and visible but required a lower level of resourcing. 'Coffee with Cops' events were also highlighted by the Committee as being very worthwhile.

Garrison Sergeant Major William Biggar summarised the relationship between the military community and the emergency services in Colchester. The military relied upon the emergency services' support, just as the emergency services gained information and support from their partnership with the Garrison. The partnerships in place allowed the military garrison to quickly and effectively disseminate vital security information to the emergency services, avoiding response problems and delays.

When the Committee requested views as to where extra investment would be most useful, a number of responses were given. The Police view was that additional funding would assist the holistic approach to tackling violent/knife crime and the drug trade and drug-related offences, including those linked to deprivation. The Chair of the Safer Colchester Partnership highlighted the improvements which could be made to data sharing and use. The Chief Executive of Community 360 called for more investment in voluntary-sector activities, including additional training capacity to quickly allow volunteers to gain vital skills.

A number of other options were raised, such as a second knife detector gate or more canine police units.

The Chair of the meeting thanked the Safer Colchester Partnership for presenting, and thanked members of the Committee for their questions and scrutiny.