

Crime and Disorder Committee

Tuesday, 16 February 2021

Attendees: Councillor Lewis Barber, Councillor Kevin Bentley, Councillor Paul Dundas, Councillor Chris Hayter, Councillor Mike Hogg, Councillor Sam McCarthy, Councillor Lorcan Whitehead
Apologies: Councillor Tina Bourne
Substitutes: Councillor Dave Harris (for Councillor Tina Bourne)

30 Minutes of Previous Meeting

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting held on 15 September 2020 be confirmed as a correct record.

31 Have Your Say! (Virtual Meetings)

Councillor Roger Mannion, of Tiptree Parish Council, addressed the Committee pursuant to the provisions of Meetings General Procedure Rule 5(1) to request information as to how Government funding for Covid Marshals was being used, how many Marshals were operating and what outcomes had so far been achieved.

Councillor Mike Lilley, Portfolio Holder for Communities, Wellbeing and Public Safety, addressed the questions, explaining that Government funding had allowed for two Marshals to be recruited. Their duties included visiting businesses which remained open, checking compliance with Covid-19 regulations and giving advice. The role had now changed, moving to one full-time marshal who dealt with public complaints and following up on these to arrange appropriate actions. This can include site visits and, where necessary, official visits and warnings by the Council's Licensing Team.

Louise Wishart addressed the Committee pursuant to the provisions of Meetings General Procedure Rule 5(1) to request an update on the revised timetable for installing an improved CCTV system in Colchester, and assurance that this remained a part of the Council's Capital Programme.

The Portfolio Holder informed the Committee that the new operating system was now in place and functioning with the existing network, including 14 new additional cameras, at a range of locations including the Town Centre (such as in the Dutch Quarter, Eld Lane, and the Centre's tunnels) and Northern Gateway Sports Park. The next step would be the renovation of the control room. It had been necessary to liaise with Essex Highways where road excavations had been needed for the installation of cables, with certain work still to do. It was hoping that the system would be fully operational by mid-June. The Portfolio Holder offered to provide a more detailed written answer to Ms. Wishart.

Chris Piggott addressed the Committee pursuant to the provisions of Meetings General Procedure Rule 5(1) to ask for information as to whether there were plans to reduce speeding in the South of Colchester, noting current work by the Police to

reduce speeds on some main roads. Speeds within residential areas was raised as a particular concern and Mr Piggott asked if enforcement action depended upon reporting of specific instances/areas, or whether a plan to address the issue was in place.

Chief Inspector Jonathan Evans addressed the questions to explain that Road Traffic and Local Community Policing Teams were both conducting enforcement actions. Resources and attention were directed to the areas where reports from the public identified particularly serious problems. In the long-term, this was an issue that required attention from the County Council and Essex Highways, regarding the layout of road systems and traffic restrictions.

A statement from Catherine Spindler was read out by an officer, pursuant to the provisions of Meetings General Procedure Rule 5(1). Mrs Spindler welcomed and praised the work of Police and Council officers working to secure prosecutions and convictions for offences relating to the supplying of illegal drugs and highlighted the damage caused by the drugs trade, to both communities and the individuals within them. The Police were asked how more support could be given to victims of the drug trade, to help them provide evidence and information to help the Police in pursuing convictions of those involved in furthering the trade of drugs.

Mrs Spindler requested that the Police liaise with Neighbourhood Watch coordinators to provide guidance as to how best to note and report problems with dog fouling in public areas.

Chief Inspector Jonathan Evans summarised some of the ways in which concerns and suspected crimes can be reported to the Police, including via Crimestoppers, Essex Police online, reporting to local community policing teams or by calling the Police on 101 [for non-emergency situations]. Teams from Operation Raptor continued their work to tackle drug supply and related crimes. The Police also worked with Colchester Borough Homes to carry out closure orders [used where individuals or use of premises has resulted in, or is likely to result in, serious nuisance to the public].

The Portfolio Holder addressed the issue of dog fouling, agreeing that this remained a problem. Where witnesses came forward, the Council took action to collect statements and conduct enforcement actions wherever possible. The Portfolio Holder asked for all members of the public to report to the Council any instances which they saw occur. Enforcement options could then be explored, including potential prosecution.

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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).

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. The Chair of the Partnership noted the questions regarding Covid Marshals and directed attention to page 39 of the agenda for the meeting, where more information was provided on the

Marshals and their work.

The Chair of the Partnership introduced Roger Hirst, the Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner, members of the partnership, including Chief Inspector Jonathan Evans, who was representing the Police in place of Chief Inspector Rob Huddleston. Also in attendance was Beverley Jones, representing the charity 'Next Chapter', which worked to help victims of domestic abuse.

The Portfolio Holder praised the partnership working carried out and its addressing of priorities, including tackling domestic violence and mental health problems. Homelessness continued to be prioritised also.

The Public Space Protection Order [PSPO] for the centre of Colchester had been extended into New Town, and other extensions would be considered where this would be of use, as the PSPO had been shown to be effective. The work done within the office of the Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner to assist with tackling issues was also praised.

Chief Inspector Jonathan Evans introduced his update on the work of Colchester's Police. This included an update on the policing response to Covid-19 and its impact on policing. There were dedicated avenues in place for concerns or potential breaches to be raised to inform action by the Police. Highlights included engaging with 6,328 members of the public, issuing 1,227 verbal warnings and 112 Fixed Penalty Notices and carrying out 396 visits to licensed premises.

Overall, crime across the Borough has decreased by 10.5% from the beginning of 2020. Anti-social behaviour reports have increased by 34%, partly due to the extension of such reports to include Covid-related reports. The level of hate crimes has risen by 16.2%.

The Chief Inspector gave an overview of work to tackle gangs and County Lines offences/activities. Drug-related offences had increased during the pandemic, with a 21.4% increase in such crimes, from 5,829 to 7,074 offences recorded. This is against the backdrop of overall decreases in criminal activities overall. The Police continued to make it their first priority to tackle drug- and gang-related problems.

Intelligence-led stop and search tactics were used as part of Operation Sceptre, with over 5,000 searches recorded across the district over 2020. 73.94% of searches were on white individuals, 16.26 on BME individuals and 9.81% did not state an ethnicity. 18 Misuse of Drugs Act warrants were utilised across the district between September 2020 and January 2021, and safeguarding operations were carried out to protect vulnerable individuals affected by County Lines criminality. Two County Lines operations were entirely dismantled during this period. The benefits of the multi-agency approach were extolled.

Priority two, reduction of violent crime and antisocial behaviour [ASB] in public places, was described. ASB reports had increased by 34%, partly due to how such reports now included Covid-related incidents. Engagement and enforcement were explained, and again, partnership working was praised, including with Colchester Borough Homes on issues relating to residential premises. Further partnership working, for

example with the Council, would be used to plan a coordinated approach to address the eventual reopening of the night time economy.

'Violence against the person' offences had seen a slight reduction of 0.2% across the district, with reductions in sexual offences of 9.2%, in robberies of 22.6% and weapon possession offences of 20.5%. Three offences of murder have resulted in suspects being located and charged for each offence. The Chief Inspector noted that the Police worked with the University to promote student safety, and with rural communities to address offences recorded in rural locations.

The priority of addressing 'hidden harms' was explained, including hate crimes, safeguarding issues (especially for vulnerable children), domestic abuse and mental health issues.

Hate crimes reported had increased by 16.2% across the district, with a solved rate of 12.6%. 80 trained ambassadors and seven Hate Incident Reporting Centres were now in place across Colchester.

Operation Enlightenment had been used to provide regular liaison with schools' safeguarding leads to share information and safeguard vulnerable children. Operation Encompass carried out information sharing with schools to safeguard children affected by, or witnessing, domestic abuse.

A focus was being given to preventative action to reduce domestic abuse incidents. Through an increase in the precept for the office of the Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner, funding had been obtained to set up a Domestic Abuse Problem Solving Team, with six officers based in Colchester, due to double to 12 by December 2021. The Team would manage protection arrangements around domestic abuse offenders, work with victims and provide a support service to support and engage victims in the criminal justice process.

Operation Aidant carried out regular visits to business locations to ensure safeguarding of vulnerable individuals and identification of potential instances of modern slavery.

Beverley Jones, Next Chapter charity, gave an overview of her organisation's work to support and help victims of domestic abuse and violence. The charity had seen an increase of around 50-60% in referrals and reports regarding domestic abuse, which differed from the data compiled by the Police. One explanation was that not all victims wanted to go through the justice system. There had been increases in victims' risk profiles due to the Covid-19 crisis, with victims losing freedoms and opportunities to escape or seek support. Perpetrators were also prevented from leaving home situations or seeking coping mechanisms. This has led to cases taking more support for longer, exacerbated by the backlog in the courts system making it harder to obtain non-molestation orders.

The closure of schools had had an impact on children, with around 3,500 living in homes with domestic abuse having been reported, with a reporting rate of only around 30-40% being estimated. There were also reduced chances for outsiders to now spot and report suspected domestic abuse, especially regarding children. Vulnerable

children were now experiencing the lowest levels of support, due to Covid-19 and lockdown measures. The pandemic had highlighted the dangers of domestic abuse and hidden harms.

The reduced capacity caused by Covid-19 was covered, including the need to close any refuge where cases of Covid-19 were discovered. Ways of working had been changed to maximise safety, and positive outcomes had come from further increasing partnership working with Open Road, Outhouse, the Police, social housing landlords and Essex County Council. Pilot schemes were being run in Tendring to support victims and conduct enforcement against perpetrators. £331k extra funding had been sourced and spent on seven extra practitioners.

The Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner [PFCC] praised the work of Next Chapter and the partnership operations in place. He explained that the Courts system is attempting to prioritise non-molestation and protection orders to minimise delays. £15m per year had been committed to in support for victims of crime in general.

Commencing the Committee's discussion, the guests were asked if ways to report hate crime and violence could be advertised and circulated to all councillors. The Chief Inspector highlighted the plan to increase visibility of patrols across all districts, community safety and engagement officers, social media, newsletters, via parish councils, schools etc. Contact options included via Hate Crime Ambassadors, reporting centres, 101 telephone number and Essex Police's website. CID investigated serious allegations. Answering questions as to whether anonymous reports could be made, the Chief Inspector explained that, whilst prosecutions would normally require reporting members of the public to identify themselves, there were options for other actions by the police which could target resources in response to reported problems, even where reports were made anonymously.

It was queried whether Next Chapter worked with local safeguarding boards and Essex Family Centres in Berechurch and Greenstead to support families. The Safer Colchester Partners were asked to confirm whether they used the services of MIND to help provide mental health support where necessary. Beverley Jones confirmed that Next Chapter did work with safeguarding boards and Essex County Council children's/family services, making referrals to them, usually involving children rather than adults. Potential new ways to provide outreach services were currently being risk assessed. MIND and other mental health support services were being used, although high demand had led to waiting times and challenges in accessing timely support, especially for acute cases. The Chief Inspector notified that the Police also worked with MIND, for example in providing support for drug-users seeking help.

Answering questions on future next steps and hopes, Beverley Jones noted Next Step's intentions to extend their service provision, building upon actions already carried out. Domestic Violence advisors had been provided for consultation at Colchester Hospital, with their safeguarding team. Around 70 referrals had been received each week, but cuts to the service necessitated by an end to the funding received for it had led to a drop in referrals down to almost none. A discussion would be had with the North East Essex Clinical Commissioning Group [NEE CCG] as to whether there was scope to reintroduce the service once Covid-related disruption lessened. Limited funding had been received to provide a pilot scheme of practitioners

in GP surgeries. There had been little interest from surgeries, despite engaging with GPs. Further attempts would be made once Covid-19 restrictions eased. Next Steps continued to work with commissioning bodies, such as the County Council and PFCC, to secure government funding and support. Proposals were being brought forward to address planned use of any funding gained.

Pam Green, Chief Operating Officer of the NEE CCG [North East Essex Clinical Commissioning Group] recommended that Lee Bailey of Essex County Council worked with Next Chapter to find end-of-year funding for hospital and/or GP surgery practitioner placements. The priority at the hospital had been to conduct suicide prevention.

The Chairman extended the Committee's thanks to all the partners helping with the conducting of the vaccination programme, with especial thanks going to Pam Green and the NEE CCG.

An update on the Rural Crime Strategy and rural crime statistics was requested, along with any updates on how unlawful encampments were addressed. The Chief Inspector detailed Operation Vocal, the response to rural crime and need to increase police visibility. Road safety was a particular concern and reported issues were being tackled. Issues such as unlawful encampments and hare coursing were addressed by working with local farmers/landowners, with patterns being analysed by the Community Policing Team. The number of illegal encampments encountered had halved since the formation of the rural policing team. Lobbying of MPs had been conducted and had resulted in the issue being addressed within an expected Bill to be laid before Parliament in the near future.

In response to a question regarding whether there would be any merit in using TruCAM technology to address speeding, The Commissioner explained that the TruCAM system was a possible option, but that a recent trial of its use in Harwich had not shown great success. Speed Watch schemes were more focused on education and prevention, rather than enforcement. Overemphasis on enforcement had the potential to cause tension in the community.

The Chief Inspector was asked for assurance that the Police continued to prioritise tackling County Lines and their ensnaring of local young people. The Chief Inspector agreed that the priorities of safeguarding the vulnerable and raising awareness of county lines issues were still being addressed by the Police. Youth officers worked with schools and youth clubs to raise awareness, including with parents and businesses. The Commissioner informed the Committee that Essex had a formal strategy to ensure commissioning of services to tackle county lines. Work was conducted with the Metropolitan Police to tackle the heads of criminal gangs, whilst Raptor interventions and stop-and-searches continued locally. 44 arrests had recently been made.

The Committee were informed that mentoring and specific services were in place to divert young people away from potential involvement with gangs. This programme was now in its second year and was yielding positive results.

A Committee member praised the good relationships built between officers, Police

Community Support Officers and communities across wards. This was felt to be working well and communications with the Police were now very good, building community links and quickly directing residents to the channels available for reporting issues. The Chief Inspector agreed and stressed the importance in receiving community intelligence to help ensure that resources are deployed to address hotspots.

It was queried whether the increase in reported drugs offences were down to an increase in offences committed, or due to greater visibility of them during Covid-19 restrictions, leading to an increase in reporting to the Police. The Chief Inspector agreed that the increased visibility of such offences had partly accounted for the increase in offences reported and clarified that such offences could only be so recorded where drugs were found. The Committee were told that the Police worked with victims to tackle perpetrators and that prosecutions related to the transport of drugs had increased by 47 cases compared to the number of prosecutions in the past year. Efforts to increase reporting and submission of evidence by the public had had a positive effect.

The Committee asked whether, when lockdown measures are gradually relaxed, the towns and larger villages in the Borough would receive support from the partner organisations and the Covid Marshals in order to ensure public health safety. The Portfolio Holder for Communities, Wellbeing and Public Safety and Charlotte Williams, the Council's Covid Compliance Co-ordinator, explained that discussions had been held to ensure that support, advice and help with safety is provided across the Borough as businesses and services reopen. Support for the Marshals would continue for their Borough-wide work, and members who wished to know more could request briefings by the Covid Compliance Co-ordinator.

Concern was raised that the Borough had experienced the third-highest suicide rate in the country, which was not in line with other factors such as deprivation. Views were sought as to why this was the case. The Chair of the Safer Colchester Partnership confirmed that resources and attention had been focused on suicide prevention, in response to the local rate being so high. Meetings had been held with the Director of Public Health for Essex to discuss and address this and the Partnership would continue to consult and work with its partners to address the issue and discern greater demographic data, especially regarding the most at-risk groups and causes.

Alison Andreas, Principal and Chief Executive of Colchester Institute detailed the support given by the Institute to young people dealing with mental health challenges. Concerted work was being conducted following four students committing suicide across the past seven years. MIND and the Wellbeing and Mental Health Resilience Team, supported by the Council and County Council, worked with 16- to 18-year-olds to conduct early referrals to address mental health difficulties. Lee Bailey, Lead for Partnership Delivery (Essex County Council) informed the Committee that extra funding had been gained for support services at the Institute and Sixth Form College which would support further work. An influx of young people suffering from suicidal thoughts or actions had been experienced by Colchester's hospital and work was underway to identify causes of this and what services might be possible to better support and address those affected. A Committee member welcomed the information given, and requested that, once further information and data was gained (e.g. on

causes) that this could be presented to a future meeting of the Committee.

The Chair of the Safer Colchester Partnership was asked to pass on thanks and praise to Colchester Borough Homes (CBH) for their work with the Police to tackle antisocial behaviour. The Chairman of the Committee agreed with this request and committed to write to CBH to offer the thanks and praise of the Committee for their important work.

It was noted that a significant increase in the use of Section 135 [Mental Health Act 1983] warrants had been recorded and questioned as to the causes of this increase. The Chief Inspector explained that these were used where deemed appropriate to safeguard those with certain mental health circumstances and that officers would assist medical professionals in carrying them out, where needed, to take individuals to safety and to assess mental health needs. Pam Donnelly, Chairman of the Safer Colchester Partnership offered to request a more detailed response from Pam Green, CEO of NEE CCG, and forward this information to all members. The Committee were informed that four years ago, a dearth of services and facilities meant that there had been limited capacity to enforce such warrants.

An expectation of reduced funding for the Safer Colchester Partnership was recorded at 13.1 of the report, and it was queried how much of a reduction was expected and to what extent it was expected that this would affect service provision. Councillor Lilley, Council Portfolio Holder for Communities, Wellbeing and Public Safety, gave the view that there was extremely limited funding to pursue community safety and explained that the Council applied to the office of the PFCC for funding where needed. Different partners had access to different funding sources and the Portfolio Holder offered to provide greater detail in written responses regarding specific types of funding if members of the Committee inform Owen Howell, Democratic Services Officer, as to which those specific types of funding were on which they wished to know more.

The Committee noted that the pandemic had seen an increase in the profile of the issue of domestic abuse and asked how this high profile could be maintained. Beverley Jones, of Next Chapter, stressed their aim to ensure high visibility for domestic abuse and violence. Local media had already indicated that they want to continue and cover what happens as the pandemic recedes. A greater use of social media and other communication options would continue. Good foundations were in place and it was hoped that the Domestic Abuse Bill would be enacted in April.

Answering questions as to whether social distancing had detrimental effects and had caused changes to ways of working, Beverley Jones informed the Committee that some clients had been moved to 'phone/remote support and that it was encouraging that good outcomes were still being achieved, without negative effects occurring. Very vulnerable individuals had remained with face-to-face contacts to maintain connections. For some who had suffered trauma, telephone options were found to be less pressurised and can lessen the fear of judgement. It was considered to be vital to offer the right level of support for each individual.

The guest partners were asked to provide more information on activities which had been available for young people in order to help them maintain their mental health wellbeing and engage with others, especially during lockdowns. Lee Bailey, Essex

County Council Children and Families Services, explained that much work was ongoing with the most vulnerable, including those at risk of sexual or criminal exploitation. Support and community safeguarding measures were reviewed, working with the Police and providing a link to restorative justice. Work continued to prevent issues and tackle them at crisis points.

The Chairman thanked all of the organisations and individuals represented at the meeting for their continuing work.

RESOLVED that: -

- a) The Committee had scrutinised the work of the Safer Colchester Partnership (SCP);
- b) The Committee expressed its thanks to all statutory and non-statutory partner organisations involved, and to the representatives who participated in this meeting and that;
- c) The Committee Chairman would write to each representative who had been present to express these thanks