

# CRIME AND DISORDER COMMITTEE

## 7 November 2022

*Present:-* Councillor Laws, Councillor Lilley, Councillor Lissimore,  
Councillor Scordis, Councillor Willetts

*Substitutes:-* Councillor Hogg for Councillor Smith

*Also Present:-* Councillor J. Young

### **39. Minutes of previous meetings.**

*RESOLVED* that the minutes of the meetings held on 14 September 2021 and 25 May 2022 be confirmed as correct records.

### **40. Have Your Say**

Ms. Natalie Sommers addressed the Committee pursuant to the provisions of Meetings Procedure Rule 5(1). Ms Sommers stated that she spoke on behalf of residents of Pondfield Road and that, since the removal of the warden, there had been drug dealing, late night parties, aggressive shouting and swearing, trespassing and other types of antisocial behaviour [ASB]. This was apparently exacerbated by a halfway house on Harwich Road. Problems from the past 24 hours included littering and rubbish dumping, discarded ladders and disordered grounds. Ms. Sommers requested that Police patrols be maintained and that the warden service be returned.

The Chairman invited Councillor Julie Young, Portfolio Holder for Housing and Communities, to respond. The Portfolio Holder said that she was not familiar with the situation but would liaise with the local Councillors and would come back with a response.

### **41. Safer Colchester Partnership**

The Chairman introduced the report, which gave an account of work across 2021-22 and an overview of forward plans, and explained the Committee's statutory nature.

Councillor Julie Young, Portfolio Holder for Housing and Communities, praised the partnership working in Colchester, which had been described as being very well developed by the local Police. Credit was given to Pam Donnelly, as former Chair of the Safer Colchester Partnership. Highlights of the past year included the use of very high quality CCTV, with excellent clarity and coverage of the Town centre. Budget pressures were severe, but neighbourhood teams had been brought to full strength. Formal and informal relationships both strengthened partnership. The Police and Council worked with Community 360 [C360] and its hub as an outreach centre and a base for walkabouts and other activities. The Licensing Team had an important role over licensing premises and taxis, and had experienced and well-qualified officers.

The Portfolio Holder looked forward to working with the new District Commander and hailed scrutiny and oversight work as being important in helping partners to focus on their priorities.

The Portfolio Holder was asked if the increase in CCTV quality had led to an increase in the number of suspects apprehended. The Committee was told that it helped to identify individuals and inform officers. An example was given, where a CCTV operator had used the cameras to guide officers to make an arrest of a violent offender in Castle Park, leading to a ten-year sentence being handed down on the day of this meeting.

The Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner informed the Committee that Essex Police had increased in size and that the prioritisation of addressing rural crime had made a positive difference. Specialist teams worked to reduce domestic abuse, violence against women and girls, and drug-related crime. Compared to pre-lockdown, crime levels were roughly comparable, however there had been a reduction in burglaries of about 28% and in ASB of about 40%. There had been an increase of around 10% in violent crime, and increases in rape and sexual assaults reported. The Commissioner highlighted that some of the increase in crimes reported was due to the criminalisation of more activities/actions over the past six years.

The Safer Streets fund had issued tow £500k grants, match funded, leading to successes being seen in places like Chelmsford and Grays. CCTV played a role, alongside improving areas and lines of sight. The Police worked with partners, including schools, to make improvements. The Commissioner argued that the Council's priorities largely matched Essex Police's priorities. Few prosecutions now occurred without use of CCTV footage, with better footage leading to more prosecutions and better cost effectiveness.

The Committee discussed the statements made regarding expansion of the number of police officers. A Committee member complained that Colchester had not seen additional officers and that local officers were stretched, stating that the night time economy was not being fully policed. The Commissioner was asked if the statistics on officer numbers included 'Special' officers and Police Community Support Officers [PCSOs]. The Commissioner explained the statistics, as provided to the Home Office. In 2010, there were 3,600 FTE [Full-time equivalent] officers, which had now risen to around 3,800 FTE officers. Investments had been made into new technology, such as hand-held devices for officers to access information remotely and efficiently, allowing them to spend roughly an hour more per shift in interacting with the public. A policy was in place for officers to attend all reported burglaries. A Committee member stated their disagreement with the figures given regarding officer numbers, but accepted what had been said. The Commissioner was asked what duties any additional officers would be deployed to cover. The Commissioner explained that the statistics only covered full, warranted officers, and not special constables or PCSOs. The Police and Crime Plan saw a strategic swing to prevention of crime and ASB, especially in hotspots. Data gathered was used to improve deployment effectiveness for officers, with use of technology to help prevent recidivism and to identify vulnerable individuals at risk. The aim was to reduce crime, rather than to increase the number of convictions.

A Committee member praised the work of special constables and explained that they worked with full police officers, often before becoming salaried full officers

themselves. They carried out many duties and the Committee member recommended that councillors find out more about what they did.

The Commissioner was asked to confirm if the number of unauthorised traveller camps had been reduced by 70% and if there had been any knock-on effects. The Commissioner explained that the 70% statistic involved the number and duration of camps. The reduction had been achieved via partnership working, and the effects of recent legislation to improve enforcement had not yet been seen. The clarifying effect of the legislation had however reduced the severity of associated ASB.

A Committee member raised their concerns that shoplifters were not being prosecuted, that the Crown Prosecution Service were failing to take cases to court, and that 999 response times were long. The Committee member also raised concerns regarding court backlogs, increasing car crime and lack of proactive patrols.

The Commissioner argued that it was not in the remit of the Committee to scrutinise his work. The Chairman reminded the Committee of its terms of reference for strategic scrutiny and overview work, and noted that localised or ward-specific matters would be more appropriately considered by Scrutiny Panel.

The Committee asked what political cover Essex Police had, should they need to intervene with environmental protestors. The Commissioner gave assurance that robust cover was in place.

Mel Rundle, Safety and Protection Manager, read out a statement from Lucie Breadman, Strategic Director, who was not able to attend the meeting. This gave an overview of issues from the Pandemic, staffing problems, the hot summer and cost of living crisis. Partnership work had been vital in addressing these issues, and detail was given of the history and successes of partnership working. Information and support were shared, with an increase in partnership members leading to a wider range of actions being possible with and within One Colchester Partnership and its Delivery Board. This led to an improvement in community safety.

The guests were asked whether there was evidence to support the assertion that an increase in partnership organisations had led to an increase in effectiveness and whether a larger partnership could be unwieldy. Detective Chief Inspector [DCI] Rob Huddleston argued that a broader partnership led to easier data sharing and a wider range of expertise on which to call. This allowed for issues to be tackled more quickly, such as reports of [drink] spiking, and easing the processing of refugees. It was pointed out that partners attended meetings as and when necessary, and not all meetings.

Statistics relating to the Safer Colchester Partnership were given, showing a 0.52% increase in crime on pre-Covid levels, but a 53.7% drop in ASB cases reported. Effective use had been made of individual orders to stop recidivism. There had been 97.1 crimes reported per 1,000 of population in the Colchester area. This was a very low rate compared to other Essex authority areas. A survey of randomly selected residents in Colchester had been conducted, showing 73% had confidence in the local police and 76% having confidence in receiving a good service. The DCI underlined work to support victims and give the best service possible, to prevent crime and victimisation before it occurred. Colchester police were invested in

proactive measures. Asked as to what was said in negative responses to the survey, the DCI gave assurance that work was underway to understand the causes of negative responses. One negative response had been as a result of dissatisfaction with the Independent Office for Police Conduct [IOPC] rather than with Essex Police.

The DCI highlighted new ways in which PCSOs engaged with the public. Colchester was deemed to be a safe place, but fear of crime is a serious matter. There had been two assaults recently, related to the night-time economy, but this was in the context of around eight or nine thousand night-time economy users.

The Committee asked the DCI for information as to plans to identify and remove any unprofessional officers from Essex Police. The DCI explained that Essex Police had a regular review coming up, which included the vetting process. A 100% avoidance of taking on bad recruits could not be guaranteed, but the Police would use the highest ethics to pursue and tackle any bad officers. The Commissioner expressed his shock at recent reports and noted that 16 officers had been removed this year for conduct unbecoming. There was a process to deal with this, and the Chief Constable took a strong line. Tough scrutiny was conducted, and Essex Police worked with the Metropolitan Police to identify ways to improve. Recruitment statistics were given, showing the drive to diversify the Police as a way to change institutional cultures and behaviours.

A Committee member expressed the difficulty they found in accepting the report that ASB levels had significantly dropped. Examples of ASB given included laughing gas use and underage alcohol consumption. The Committee member complained that only a mixed response had been received from the Police, without attendance for each case reported. The DCI highlighted the importance of the Police working with the Council's licensing officers. The Police encouraged residents to report incidents online, so they could be identified and addressed. 'Stroll with patrol' engagements were carried out, and officers worked with schools and the Commissioner's team to deliver lessons on safer relationships, dealing with domestic abuse, drug awareness and gangs.

Mel Rundle, Safety and Protection Manager, explained that schools were represented on the Safer Colchester Partnership, with a representative from the North Essex Association of Secondary School Headteachers.

The Committee discussed the differences between crime and fear of crime, and the DCI was asked how he viewed the role of PCSOs, especially regarding unparished areas. The DCI talked of police visibility and argued that perception was worse than reality, and that there were more effective ways to use officers to reduce crimes than just using them to patrol. PCSOs could provide deterrence through patrols, and were an avenue for resident engagement.

Chief Inspector Colin Cox, District Commander since 31 October 2022, was on duty and could not attend, but was looking at how to improve engagement and provide better data to stakeholders such as councillors.

A Committee member noted the challenges posed by lockdowns, and then by the heatwave, with increased ASB especially in holidays. The guests were asked how this was addressed. The DCI explained that his officers had worked with counterparts in Suffolk and Tendring, cross borders. Essex-wide units also operated

in the Colchester area. An increase in UK tourism had seen some areas see increased ASB, parking issues and littering. Problems had been noted, with tolerance and patience being lost since Covid. The DCI acknowledged that it was a challenge to increase trust in the Police, with better trust expected to increase the level of incident reporting. The 101 line had issues, but there were other reporting avenues, such as online. The DCI stated that system abuse needed to be stopped, to allow officers to focus on real reports, and that people needed to understand criminal investigation, and why officers did not attend if there was no hope of identifying a culprit or resolving a case.

An outline was given of the triage system used to focus work, based on degree of harm, likelihood of success in prosecution and other criteria. A trial was commenced for PCSOs to attend where crimes were reported, in order to give advice and support. Plain clothes officers were sent to any property where burglaries were reported, with a scene of crime officer to examine the property, talk to neighbours and leave notes where no-one responds. It was now easier to obtain footage, such as videos recorded by door cameras.

The DCI described the police focus on drug-related violence and on vulnerable users, victims and at-risk groups. Disrupting gangs stopped the ability to trade drugs. Any SCP partner could flag up individual of concern to discuss. Work was done to stop vulnerable individuals getting involved, which improved community safety. Examples of enforcement and prosecution were given, regarding local dealers and gangs, including 'strike' days to apprehend perpetrators for prosecution.

The Serious Violence Unit was staffed by specialist detectives to focus on the violence caused by the drug trade. Technology helped officers to apprehend whole supply lines, with action taken against 25 organised crime supply lines. After existing lines were broken up, action was now underway to target gangs looking to fill the gaps produced. Intelligence teams sought information to direct enforcement actions. Those who were exploited were identified, with over 80% of those exploited by county lines gangs were British children. Work was done with schools to improve trust in the police and form positive links. The police's partner organisations could use their own powers to help detect issues and provide the information needed for detection, disruption and enforcement.

The DCI outlined the scrutiny and oversight for the police. District commanders were scrutinised centrally in Essex, involving regional bodies.

The Violence and Vulnerability Unit was described, with its funding, resources and remit to help those victimised and endangered by the drug trade and gangs. Multi-agency child exploitation conferences [MACEs] were used to catch concerns at early stages where concerns were identified and fed into the Safer Colchester Partnership [SCP]. Examples were given as to how this prevented child exploitation. Partnerships with schools was vital, collecting information which would not be provided directly to the police. Operation Luscombe had been initiated to help street homeless, get them support and help them escape crime, alongside strict enforcement actions against individuals who refused to engage.

The Detective Chief Inspector was asked if Essex Police had a good enough representation of different ethnicities to tackle criminals effectively. The DCI affirmed that there were sufficient resources to conduct covert operations and, whilst there

was some way to go to achieve full representation in the police of all communities in Essex, this was a priority for the Police. Ethical and lawful use was made of 'stop and search' powers, with data on their use being scrutinised. The mix of officers assigned to organised crime teams was outlined.

A Committee member praised the local success of the Police in tackling drug gangs, with great progress having been made. The DCI was asked if investigations went up county lines to those in charge of the gangs, and whether the pursuit of county lines gangs remained as a high priority. The DCI gave assurance that the three main priorities of the Police, including tackling the drug trade and its effects, were of equal importance. 27 county lines gangs had been entirely wound up in the past 12 months. The Modern Slavery Act could also be used where gangs transported children to exploit in their county lines.

A Committee member requested more information on how drugs were moved, suggesting that 'stop and search' powers could be used to help those exploited by the gangs. The DCI explained the Scrutiny Panel which examined the statistics for 'stop and search' and examining random examples of where the powers had been used. Confiscation of drugs from exploited children could be a double-edged sword, as this often led those children to then be 'in debt' to the gang, causing a worsening of the safeguarding concern. The safety of those children was a key priority. Examples were given as to how prosecution of exploiters was conducted, and of how drugs were transported, concealed and developed.

The Commissioner emphasised the importance of police work using knowledge of housing and tenant data, and information gathered from licensees and from youth work. The DCI described the very close work with Colchester Borough Homes [CBH], to use CBH's powers, including closure orders. This was especially effective where concerns regarding vulnerable individuals were identified at an early stage. Examples were given of joint enforcement actions, and data sharing with the Multi-Agency Co-ordination Panel. Additional work to identify vulnerable individuals was carried out in the night-time economy, with Open Road, street pastors and others to triage help and ease workloads on police officers. Operatives and front-line staff at the Council and CBH were trained to identify risks and warning signs. Thousands of front-line staff at different organisations had been trained to identify signs for concerns and to flag these up for action to be taken.

The Portfolio Holder for Housing and Communities commented that good partnerships had been put in place, and that these were kept under assessment to ensure that they worked well and to identify possible improvements. An example was where problems were raised with the Peabody-run Harwood House, which required more investment and resources to resolve. The Committee discussed the work of Housing Officers, their high workloads and the need to support them in work to identify vulnerable residents. Nathan Suley, Community Safety Manager at CBH, agreed that the officers were very overworked. A new three-year tenancy audit programme was starting to see visits to all properties, and this was used to identify and raise concerns for investigation, such as where there are suspicions of 'cuckooing'

A Committee member asked if there was any way to use the assets and cash seized as being related to crime, such as to pay for local services for young people and vulnerable individuals. The DCI explained that such assets and cash were seized

under the Proceeds of Crime legislation, with a percentage going to the Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner to disburse. The Commissioner agreed to check to see what amount had been disbursed and provide the information to the Committee.

The DCI described the investments made in the City and Rural Engagement Teams [RETs], and reductions in motoring offences and antisocial behaviour. Colchester was a large district by area. Investments included in CCTV and increasing the Town Centre Team by four PCs in 2023. The Team worked until 4am, to cover the night-time economy. Efforts to stop recidivism included orders to prevent people for pursuing acts which would otherwise be legal, such as preventing graffiti producers from carrying legal equipment that could be used for creating graffiti. Pubwatch worked with licensees, who were keen to improve safety, to swiftly address any reports. The Town Centre Team also worked with retailers and would be based in Longwyre Street over Christmas, to increase their visibility.

Dedicated PCSOs were assigned to each area, building relationships, contacts and data. The RETs had the expertise to quickly deal with issues, which had led to a decrease in the problem of illegal encampments. The Police engaged with farmers on a range of issues, from prevention of hare coursing, to prevention of ASB that damaged farms and crops. Advice was provided to farmers and business owners to prevent crime and ASB.

Motoring ASB was a mobile issue and the Police worked with ECC and other partners to address it. Public Space Protection Orders [PSPOs] were used to prohibit motoring ASB district wide. This was the first area to have this approach approved by a court. Stringent and strict powers were now available for use, with the PSPO being well-publicised and leading to no complaints about motoring ASB being received since its introduction.

The DCI explained the approach to perpetrator management, with the most harmful offenders each being 'owned' by a team that proactively monitored and checked on them. All issues and information were triaged to specific officers and tasking meetings. The Community Safety Manager at CBH described the ASB Forum for all social housing providers in the area, sharing intelligence, giving training and holding a quarterly board on ASB matters. Field officers were met with, and tasking meetings held. CBH held delegated enforcement powers from the Council. The DCI highlighted work to reduce the fear of crime, with engagement opportunities to build trust with communities. Hate crimes and concerns were tackled with partners, and Hate Crime Ambassadors. Work was conducted with the University of Essex on student safety, especially new students in Freshers Week, and a safety syllabus had been produced.

A Committee member noted the importance of setting up information channels, which the Council/CBH did as a responsible landlord, and asked about its cost and how much of this work was also conducted by other social housing providers. The Community Safety Manager at CBH explained that natural connections were made, at no significant extra cost. Cooperation between experts and partners saved money. CBH had delegated powers from the Council which other housing providers did not have, and the company exercised these for other housing providers and guided them through possible actions. All providers wanted to reduce ASB issues. The Community Safety Manager was asked if he felt the Safer Colchester Partnership should extend its reach and go further on ASB in housing. The Community Safety

Manager gave assurance that sufficient powers were already in place and that the strongest measures had not been needed as yet. The Community Safety Manager explained that action could be taken against any housing provider where its action or lack of action was harming a community. CBH and the Partnership wanted, however, to avoid burning bridges with partners and so pursued an amicable approach whenever possible. A Committee member expressed thanks to CBH and the Police for help given to address a hate crime in their ward, providing victim support and enforcement action against the perpetrator. The Community Safety Manager at CBH underlined the importance of signposting problems for the Hate Crime Ambassadors to tackle.

The DCI outlined the national challenge faced by the Police to tackle domestic abuse [DA] and violence against women and girls. This included the need to ensure strict vetting of people joining the police, to ensure officer integrity. The policies and strategies to address DA, violence against women, and sexual crimes. Work was conducted to increase knowledge of these issues in schools, universities and other educational institutions. Examples were given of how community intelligence had been used to instigate preventative action to avoid crime. Data was used to identify the highest-risk offenders and potential victims. This was split between work to protect victims and reduce the likelihood of offences occurring. Trust building with victims was used to help get them out of danger and to be able to participate in tackling the problem. 26 high-risk offenders were currently being managed, including use of disclosure laws and work in prisons to prevent reoffending.

Beverley Jones, Chief Executive of Next Chapter, gave the context to her organisation's work. There was an upward trend in the number of referrals received, even after lockdown ended. There had been an increase of around 45% in the past two years, with around 12,000 referrals. 30% came from Colchester, where there had been a 35% increase in referrals. The most common type of referral was then communicated to the Police. The reasons for increases in referrals include an increase in awareness of issues and a drop in the toleration of abuse. This had always been a hidden harm issue, hampered by stigma.

Court backlogs meant that some domestic abuse cases were listed with 18 month waiting time. It was difficult to keep cases active, with an issue being that some victims wanted to drop cases and move on with life. Emergency non-molestation orders took around three months to obtain from courts, with delays in action increasing the severity of problems faced by victims. Issues had been found regarding GP record disclosures, with abusers forcing victims to give them access to their records. One potential harm from this is if the records cover discussion of domestic abuse and actions taken. It was seen as a positive that there was increased awareness and willingness to report abuse, with increased knowledge as to how people could report abuse concerns. A new, funded, project had been commenced to change the way high risk offenders were managed and victims safeguarded. Work was conducted with communities to advertise services and ways to get help. The re-referral rate was around 25%, with a relatively high rate being positive as it made it more likely that a resolution would be achieved.

The Committee queried whether Colchester's referral rate was disproportionately high. The Chief Executive agreed that the local rate was marginally higher than the average, which was partly explained by Next Chapter having been based in Colchester for years, with more local awareness of the services provided.



The Committee discussed the waiting time to get action and court orders against perpetrators. In very severe cases, the police worked with Next Chapter to identify and prevent imminent danger and offences. A new app had been developed to help victims upload evidence quickly and easily. The guests were asked if there were other ways to expedite action. The Chief Executive of Next Chapter said that courts had given some priority to dealing with domestic abuse cases, but the volume of cases meant major delays were experienced. The DCI explained that one option, where possible, was prosecution to be carried out in ways which did not require victim participation. This could also minimise trauma.

Comments from the Committee noted that the partnership arrangements worked well, with no serious issues identified, but underlining the importance of review and scrutiny. Statistics seem to indicate that Colchester had one of the best performing partnerships, with a surprisingly wide intelligence gathering network. A Committee member stated that it would help to have a manned advice and contact line for the partners such as the probation service. Another member suggested improving signposting to reporting options and asked how digitally excluded residents could report concerns.

The Committee discussed whether it should table a work item to look at the backlog in getting cases processed through the courts system, and ways for cases to be seen more quickly. It was noted that there was nothing the Council could do to influence the speed of the courts' working, but the Committee signalled interest in giving further consideration to this matter.

The Portfolio Holder noted the comments and concerns regarding vulnerable tenants and levels of safeguarding by different social housing providers, promising to follow up on these to seek assurances and push other social landlords to increase their proactive safeguarding.

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) An item be added to the work programme of the Scrutiny Panel to seek any ways in which the backlog of court cases could be reduced and speed of court actions increased, and any ways the Council can act to that aim.