

CRIME AND DISORDER COMMITTEE

10 SEPTEMBER 2013

Present :- Councillor Beverly Davies (Chairman)
Councillors Kevin Bentley, Nick Cope, Marcus Harrington, Dave Harris, Jo Hayes, Mike Hogg and Gerard Oxford

Substitute Member :- Councillor Theresa Higgins for Councillor Peter Higgins

Also in Attendance :- Councillor Nick Barlow
Councillor Pauline Hazell
Councillor Will Quince
Councillor Tim Young

3. Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on 22 May 2013 was confirmed as a correct record.

4. Safer Colchester Partnership

Councillor Tim Young (in respect of being Vice Chairman of the Essex Probation Service and his spouse being a Member of Essex County Council), Councillor Davies (in respect of being the Vice Chairman of CCVS and a Colchester Magistrate), Councillor Hogg (in respect of being a License Holder to sell alcohol) and Councillors Bentley, Harris and Theresa Higgins (in respect of being Members of Essex County Council) all declared a non-pecuniary interest in the following item pursuant to the provisions of Meetings General Procedure Rule 7(5):

4. Safer Colchester Partnership

The Committee was invited to consider and comment on the work of the Safer Colchester Partnership.

Introduction

Councillor Tim Young, Portfolio Holder for Planning, Community Safety and Culture and Member of the Police and Crime panel thanked the Committee for allowing him to introduce the Safer Colchester Partnership review.

Councillor Young introduced and welcomed the following guests attending the meeting;
Major Adrian Grinonneau, Chief of Staff, Colchester Garrison
Mr. Henry Griffiths, Probation Service, Colchester
Chief Inspector Richard Phillibrown, District Commander, Essex Police
Mr. Carl Pullen, Community Safety Liaison Officer, Essex Fire and Rescue
Ms. Sarah Wright, Chief Executive, Open Road
Ms. Anna Trudgian, Operations Manager, Open Road

Mrs. Alison Woolnough, Public Health, Essex County Council
Ms. Karen Williams, Colchester Borough Homes
Mrs. Pam Donnelly, Executive Director, Customer Operations and Customers and
Chairman of the Safer Colchester Partnership
Ms. Bridget Tighe, Community Initiatives Manager

Councillor Young said the guests regularly attend the Safer Colchester Partnership meetings, an important partnership, where partners worked together to fight crime and disorder in the Borough.

Joint Presentation

Police and Crime Panel

Councillor T. Young provided an update on the work of the Police and Crime Panel (PCP), the body responsible for scrutinising the work of the Police and Crime Commissioner (PCC).

Councillor Young said the first Commissioner was elected in November 2012.

The Police and Crime Panel is chaired by Councillor John Jowers (Colchester) as the responsible Portfolio Holder at Essex County Council.

Councillor Young said there has been a series of preparatory meetings held, with important appointments made to replace the Police Authority, e.g. Chief of Staff and the Chief Constable.

Regarding the Safer Colchester Partnership, Councillor Young said it was fundamental and key to tackling crime and disorder in the Borough, with a number of changes, for example, a new SOS Bus and the revamping of Neighbourhood Action Panels, and was achieving positive results despite the financial pressures, something to be justifiably proud of.

Safer Colchester Partnership (SCP)

Mrs. Pam Donnelly presented the report on the Safer Colchester Partnership, to whom she thanked Ms. Bridget Tighe for compiling the report on her behalf.

Mrs. Donnelly said when taking on the Chairmanship of the SCP her first observation was the level of responsibility that went with the role, with a whole range of partners supporting the work to reduce crime and disorder, mirrored by those present at the meeting. She added that the Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG) whilst not present at the meeting was a new and fully committed partner to the SCP.

Mrs. Donnelly spoke of the importance of data sharing between the partners, as mentioned in the report, saying that more effective data sharing will lead to resources being targeted to where they are needed most, an important initiative moving forward.

She said the SCP action plan for this year was focusing on four priorities, i) addressing domestic abuse, ii) reducing reoffending, iii) addressing alcohol misuse, and iv)

reducing crime and the fear of crime. The level of work being done in moving towards achieving these priorities was extensive, as noted in paragraphs four of the report, and for example, in addressing domestic abuse, the partnership contributed funding to the work of the Women's Safety Worker, who during the year worked on 83 cases, the work of the Police and Probation Service in targeting and supporting offenders as part of the initiative to reduce reoffending, and the work of Crucial Crew with their initiatives to work with people with learning disabilities as part of the Keep Safe Project, and to provide help and advice to older people to enable them to reduce potential crime and reduce the fear of crime.

Open discussion

Whilst accepting it was an over simplification, Councillor Harrington asked whether earlier closing times for clubs and pubs would reduce alcohol misuse. Councillor Young said alcohol misuse was a very wide and complex issue, and reducing opening time was one of many initiatives that could contribute towards reducing alcohol misuse. The Police do work closely with the Licensing Committee, a joint approach that gives a more balanced view, and where appropriate provides the opportunity for a tougher approach. Councillor Cope added that as Chairman of the Licensing Committee, it was part of the Licensing Committee policy to reduce crime and disorder, and to this end, welcomed the Police's involvement and advice to the Committee, when approving licenses. Councillor Hayes said that her own experience was that unless someone objects to a license application for legitimate reasons the application will be approved.

Councillor Bentley said whilst he was supportive of the successful work of the Police Commissioner and Police Crime Panel (PCP), he felt reviewing this work as part of the SCP review will not give it due justice, and suggested that the Panel invite the Police Commissioner and Chairman of the PCP to a meeting later in the Municipal Year.

Councillor Davies requested the list of organisations that have signed up to be part of the Keep Safe Project.

Essex Police

Chief Inspector (CI) Richard Phillibrown addressed the Committee and provided an update on the Colchester District Command of Essex Police, regarding the reform programmes undertaken, the new Colchester District Command Structure as of September 2013 and a crime profile for the current year so far, by way of comparison with 2012.

CI Phillibrown explained that the Police had gone through various reform programmes since 2011, including, two Comprehensive Spending Reviews (CSR), the first in 2010 with the need to save £41m by 2013-14, and the second estimating a further £18m of savings will be required by 2015-16. The CSRs have had, and will continue to have a massive impact on staffing, the biggest challenge ever faced by the Police, with 300 posts lost as part of the first CSR and a further 350 or more posts anticipated to be lost as part of the second CSR.

CI Phillibrown presented two staffing structures for comparison, the Colchester District

Command as it was in January 2013, and as it is now in September 2013. He said the structure showed that the Neighbourhood Policing Teams and Neighbourhood Crime Teams will remain local and will provide greater coverage and functionality to the local force.

CI Phillibrown presented a breakdown of crime statistics for the period April – July 2013, profiled for year end against last years results, and with a year on year +/- percentage difference. He agreed that the crime statistics could be forwarded to Panel Members after the meeting.

Open discussion

In response to Councillor Hayes, CI Phillibrown said the Police support the campaign to encourage Licensees to sell alcohol in plastic glasses. The Police also provide information to the License Committee, but it is for the Committee to either support or reject the application.

Given the Police reforms Councillor Harris asked about the morale of the Police force. CI Phillibrown said with a reducing capability, he wouldn't lie, and morale could be better. Regarding how this might affect the SCP, he added that there are common threads of work by different partners, but innovative and more effective ways of working in partnership will help the continued support. Colchester has the largest population of any district in Essex and continues to expand, with a growing local economy with a mixture of businesses with different ethnic cultures, supported by a large student population. He added that there is now a greater expectation of the Police with a reducing workforce, but he hoped more effective functional teams will to some degree go towards achieving future success.

In response to Councillor Davies, CI Phillibrown said 'Home Guard' (a poster was shown to the Committee) was a locally driven initiative introduced in May 2013. It was functioning in all wards, and whilst not progressing at speed, was working for the Police. It was an effective initiative that sees volunteers team up with Police and other partners to visit homes to appeal for information, give crime prevention advice and gather intelligence. More than 4,000 homes in Colchester have already been visited as part of the operation. He added that it provided an opportunity to deploy staff if we see a crime developing. Whilst welcoming the initiative, Councillor Bentley said the wording on the poster could possibly heighten the fear of crime, and suggested rephrasing the words would be helpful. CI Phillibrown responded to Councillor T. Higgins, saying that regarding deaf people, those with a hearing disability or people who cannot speak or read English, the Police can call upon staff who can sign (language) or who are bilingual. In order that the Police engage with all communities and people with disability, he welcomed any feedback that will improve communication. He added the land line number advertised was purposeful, set-up in conjunction with an electronic answer phone service that provided anonymity.

In response to Councillor Bentley, CI Phillibrown said in twenty years as a Police Officer, working across the County, he said Colchester was in many respects different to the other policing areas he had worked, but that said, the crime per capita in Colchester was lower than the national average, based on statistics from the National

Crime Reporting Process as used by Colchester. He believed local people are living in one of the safest parts of the Country and it was his intention to help keep it that way.

Councillor Oxford said a huge thank you to police officers Lee Ward and Daniel Potts for their hard work in engaging with young people in the Highwoods Ward.

In response to Councillor Oxford and given his experiences with the Highwoods Neighbourhood Action Panel (NAP) and the effectiveness of the NAPs to deliver on projects or issues, CI Phillibrown said the view of the Police was they had in the past had difficulty in resourcing the original twelve NAPs, but now these had been reduced to seven, with each reflecting the area of the Street Zones, there was now a commitment by the Police to provide representatives to all meetings. Anecdotal feedback suggested the Police are less effective at NAPS with fewer policing issues or issues where the Police can provide a positive contribution. He said whilst he wanted the Police to play an active role, the attendance from the public was very poor and needed addressing and if notice of meeting dates could be provided at a much earlier date it will make it easier for officers to attend. Councillor Young said NAPs remained very relevant to local communities, and the reduction in the number of NAPs was a reality due to financial restraints put on the organisers. The number of NAPs now matches the Zonal Areas and it will be possible to facilitate this level of NAP meetings. Whilst the NAPs had a very important part to play in local participation to discuss local issues it was understood that many issues relate to Essex County Council and The Highway Agency. Councillor Davies said at Prettygate there is no Parish Council or Residents Association and the NAP was the only way local people could have a voice. She didn't think the NAP had been effective in the past but looked forward to the Zone NAP operating differently in the future and will feed back her comments if it did not improve. Councillor Bentley said West Mersea had abandoned a NAP because the relationship between the Local Parish Council, Essex County Council and the Police is so good, community involvement through the Parish Council worked very well. That said he understood that one size doesn't fit all, and it's about what's good for the community. Major Grinonneau, Garrison Chief of Staff, said the Army chair the NAP in their neighbourhood. He said the NAP was vital because it was a more transient community with a 50% rotation in residents every two years. Major Grinonneau said the Army conduct their own action panel and the information is fed into the local NAP where the decisions are made and the information fed back into the army community. The army families have representatives on the NAP, and the NAP enables army families to integrate into the wider community, to understand the community they have moved into and to positively contribute to changes in the community.

Regarding knife crime, CI Phillibrown responded to Councillor Cope saying that knife crime is not a specific offence and therefore not shown in the Crime Profile Statistics presented to the Committee. That said knives can be used as part of the crime committed, for example, in the case of armed robbery and burglary and murder. Knife crime was marginally higher in Colchester than the remainder of Essex, though lower than the national average. CI Phillibrown said knife crime has been subject to a lot of study work and it is recognised that in most cases a person in possession of a knife does so either for personal protection or as a fashion statement, though studies show it is a complex subject and for example, there is not a direct correlation between drug trafficking and possession of knives. He added that it was down to education to try to

reduce knife crime, though it was more difficult to control the ownership of knives as they are not a specific weapon you can restrict like a firearm and are freely available to all people. CI Phillibrown said knife crime remains a very topical subject, and a report on knife crime will be presented to the Police and Crime Commissioner next week.

Regarding education and communication with young people in respect of drug and alcohol misuse, CI Phillibrown, in response to Councillor Hayes said the Police do engage with students at the University. With a greater number of students now on campus due to increased accommodation, the Police have a police officer working on site, engaging closely with and advising the students. With Colchester having an ever increasing number of multi-faith venues with wide cosmopolitan mix, it does attract young people, local people, students and army personnel and it is understood that many of these risk being victims of crime. He added that the force employs youth officers in all Essex districts, with three in Colchester working closely with the local schools, with a wider role than the original school officers.

In response to Councillor Davies, CI Phillibrown said the Colchester Command currently has 40 special officers, a declining number. He was now trying to increase this number and increase the number of Neighbourhood Watches in Colchester, an initiative that is especially poor in Colchester. He said he was also looking to provide 'Specials' to outlying urban areas, with the possibility of deploying officers from the West Mersea and Tiptree Fire Stations. The Police are also going to run a pilot scheme of specials in the Greenstead area from October, for a period of six months.

Councillor Hogg welcomed the Police's continued commitment to Neighbourhood Watches (NWs), and asked that any information regarding NWs will be circulated to Ward Councillors and NAPs. CI Phillibrown said for this initiative to be successful it required more voluntary contributions from the public. CI Phillibrown said he had a dedicated officer liaising with Parish Councils and NWs, but the SCP needs to lobby Colchester people to set-up more NWs and he assured the Committee that his officers will be committed to helping and advising on the set-up process.

In response to Councillor Harris and Hayes regarding domestic abuse, Councillor Young said the work on domestic abuse is primarily the function of the Probation Service. That said, the SCP was one of the few partnerships that continues to fund a Women Safety officer post and a recent presentation to the local Responsible Authorities Group highlighted the need to retain this post and continue the important work. CI Phillibrown said the Police have changed their procedures in respect of domestic abuse, and in cases of low level instances, where there are five reported cases by the same perpetrator in a three month period the Police do introduce a risk plan to address the case issues. He stressed this did not include the more significant cases that involves the Safeguarding and Crime Investigation Teams.

Open Road SOS Bus

Ms Sarah Wright and Ms. Anna Trudgian gave a joint presentation on Open Road and the SOS Bus.

It was explained that Open Road is a registered charity that runs the Colchester SOS

Bus.

The SOS Bus had a night time and day time use, and was the first point of contact for those whose well being is threatened by an inability to get home, illness or injury, emotional distress or alcohol and drug misuse. Their primary role was to offer immediate assistance to individuals at risk and who present themselves at SOS Bus, provide medical attention, help to those in emotional and psychological distress, support those who are vulnerable, reduce attendances at the hospital's Accident and Emergency (A&E) Unit and reduce anti-social behaviour and crime.

The SOS Bus has helped over 5,000 vulnerable individuals since October 2008, treated over 1,900 people requiring medical assistance, assisted over 5,000 individuals, prevented more 2,000 A&E attendances and handed-out over 35,000 bottles of water.

The multi agency partnership support is crucial to the success of the project, reduces ambulance call outs and A&E attendances, reduces anti-social behaviour in the town centre and with the support from qualified healthcare professionals saved the NHS on average £14k per month.

Open Road employs one full time co-ordinator that has been with the project since 2008, plus sixty five active volunteers, with trained volunteers in conflict management, child protection, infection control, listening skills and drug and alcohol awareness. Training is taken very seriously, and has to be given the seriousness of the situations the trained volunteers are involved in, and support when necessary is provided by the Police who remain very supportive of the SOS Bus initiative.

The current cost to run the SOS Bus is £80k per annum, but following commitments from the CCG, charitable trusts, Drug Alcohol Action Team, Colchester Borough Council and public donations remained £25k short of income in the current year. Hearing the positive and complimentary comments of young people and parents regarding the SOS Bus confirms that local people want the SOS Bus to remain, but it is understood that there remains financial pressures in maintaining this service.

Open discussion

Councillor Bentley said all the people associated with the SOS Bus operation are heroes and should be applauded for their dedication to this difficult work. He said that Colchester should have an ambition where in the future this great bus is not needed.

Ms. Wright and Trudgian said they understood the sentiments and agreed it would be a great situation to be in where the SOS Bus resource and project was not needed. They added that while the town centre pubs and clubs get a lot of negative comments for allowing young people to get drunk and disorderly, the blame doesn't just lie with them, that many of the young 'front-load' with alcohol from home or purchased from supermarkets or off-licences, and whilst reasonably sober and well behaved when entering the pubs and clubs, are tipped over the edge by only one or two further drinks. She said it was human nature that some young people will experiment with alcohol and drugs, and to get to a situation where the bus is not needed will require a

comprehensive education programme for the very young, and the SOS Bus could be a very good resource to go out to the schools to achieve this. Open Road was open to any ideas that will reduce and ultimately negate the need for the SOS Bus. But the problem is multifaceted with all the different issues making it very complex with no easy quick fixes or solutions.

Councillor Young understood Councillor Bentley's comments concerning the ambition for Colchester, but for the foreseeable future the SOS Bus and volunteer workers will be needed. He said the funding of the project remained an issue and whilst the Partnership was fully supportive of the project, difficult conversations will be taking place on Thursday with Open Road about keeping the project running. That said, the pubs and clubs (who all support the project) and supermarkets, who all in some way contribute to the need to run the SOS Bus do not contribute any money to the project and that in some way suggests that by contributing to the project they will be admitting their guilt in contributing towards the causes.

Councillor Bentley said he understood the comments. He felt there was still an opportunity for thinking innovatively about how to help the project, find ways of generating funds, for example as Councillor Harrington suggested, imposing a levy on drinking establishments based on the number of referrals to the SOS Bus, to contribute towards the costs, using the press and media to help run a campaign to inform and educate, and examine the licensing laws to establish consistency in the way they are implemented and enforced, with a view to getting tougher. He added that the subject had been discussed in Colchester for as long as he could remember and it was about time some proactive action was taken. In response to Councillor Bentley, Ms. Trudgian said many grateful parents of children being helped by the SOS Bus write letters of support and give contributions, but there are parents who do not wish to get involved. Councillor Young added that regarding establishments breaking licensing laws, a high profile local prosecution would jolt the other establishments into ensuring they operated within the law, but again this will be difficult to achieve with establishments and customers getting smarter, for example in producing what appears to be valid ID cards.

Councillor Oxford thanked Open Road for their hard work and dedication. He remained dismayed at the problem and found it difficult to understand the mentality of people simply getting fun out of going out to get drunk and disorderly, and did not witness this behaviour when recently holidaying abroad. A change of culture was needed with greater self responsibility.

Members understood the complexity of the reasons and issues surrounding drug and alcohol misuse. Ms. Trudgian said it was complex, with the need for social and cultural change. She added that if members wanted more information she would be happy to facilitate a presentation on addiction and abuse.

Councillor Young responded to Councillor T. Higgins regarding Purple Flag status (an award that recognises great hospitality and entertainment areas at night), and whether clubs and pubs have to be more involved in order to meet the award criteria, said yes the majority of pubs and clubs are supportive and these establishments do encourage responsible drinking. But there remain some establishments that do not engage and it was for the SCP and groups like Pub Watch to encourage their participation, but if they

don't, the Council needs the authority to be able to enforce change.

Councillor Cope said the discussions are to some extent questioning the way the licensing committee works and how officers enforce the laws, and wondered if it was appropriate for the Scrutiny Panel to undertake a review of the processes. He added that late night levies had been discussed with officers and the advice appeared to be changing. Mrs. Donnelly said the Committee was speaking about the statutory nature, rules and remit of the Licensing Committee, and the work of the officers involved in Licensing, and felt it was appropriate to seek advice from the Monitoring Officer and the Head of Professional Services. Mrs. Donnelly suggested that the Committee agree for her to determine this advice and brief Members of the Scrutiny Panel at the next Scrutiny briefing.

Councillor Bentley agreed in principal to a paper being submitted to a future briefing, but still believed the whole subject needed more traction. He requested all the Group Leaders (present at the meeting) to agree to a 'debate' item at Council, to discuss the issue in detail with all members, and to agree a motion, a form of words to be sent to the Minister of Justice that outlined a strong message of the seriousness of the problem.

Councillor Hayes liked very much the idea of making representation to a national level. Councillor Hayes said if the Council could somehow agree to Essex Police agreeing to the late night levy being used to fund the SOS Bus then there would be some sense to Colchester having a late night levy because levies enforced on local businesses should be used locally. Councillor Hayes said she would like any Council debate to consider asking Parliament to re-examine why alcohol drinking, linked to aggression is lawful, whereas recreational drugs, with no history of being linked to aggression, is unlawful. She felt that 'Vertical Drinking', a method used by drinking establishments to increase profits by, for example, removing seating and turning up the volume of the music, thereby leaving the customer with nothing to do but drink, should be examined, as should an initiative she once observed where young people arriving at Colchester were turned away by the Police where they were judged already to be drunk, before being allowed to wander around the town centre in a drunken state.

In response to Councillor Davies, Mrs. Donnelly agreed that the request to the SCP to provide a collective report to consider and address the issues raised was an appropriate request. The collective expertise would be essential to a comprehensive response. She added that the request will be added to a future agenda with a view to consider the request and work out the resources.

In respect of the initiatives needed to raise funds, Councillor Young responded to Councillor Davies saying the Partnership are looking at ways of providing free fuel to the SOS Bus, and whilst the local filling stations have shown no interest, there may be an opportunity to get fuel via the Essex Fire and Rescue Service.

RESOLVED that the Committee;

- i) Commented on and noted the Safer Colchester Partnership report.

- ii) Thanked all the guests for attending the meeting, giving presentations and responding positively to questions from Members of the Committee.
- iii) Requested the list of organisations that have signed up to be part of the Keep Safe Project.
- iv) Requested a copy of the crime statistics profile presented by CI Phillibrown.
- v) Requested Mrs. Donnelly to seek advice from the Monitoring Officer and the Head of Professional Services in respect of the Councils Licensing Laws and the remit of the Licensing Committee, and to brief the Chairman and Group Spokespersons at a future Scrutiny Panel briefing.
- vi) Requested all the Group Leaders (present at the meeting) to agree to a 'debate' item at Council, to discuss the issues raised in detail with all members, and to agree a motion, a form of words to be sent to the Minister of Justice that outlined a strong message of the seriousness of the problem.
- vii) Asked the SCP to consider a request to provide a collective report to consider and address the issues raised, and report back to the Committee at a later date, to be agreed with the Chairman and Mrs. Donnelly.