

CRIME AND DISORDER COMMITTEE

19 September 2023

Present:- Councillor Laws, Councillor McLean, Councillor Rowe, Councillor Smalls, Councillor Spindler, Councillor Willetts.

Substitutes:- Councillor Spindler for Councillor McCarthy

44. Approval of minutes

The minutes of the meetings held on 7 November 2022 and 24 May 2023 were approved as correct records.

45. Have your say

Mr Colin Ffloyd-Thurgood attended and addressed the Committee, pursuant to the provisions of Meetings Procedure Rule 5(1), to raise his concerns regarding antisocial behaviour in Castle Park. As a regular user of the Park, Mr Ffloyd-Thurgood felt concern regarding antisocial behaviour by dog walkers, cyclists, day-drinkers and drug users, especially in Upper Castle Park. Security was described as lax, and signage was described as being ignored. Park gardeners worked hard but often received abuse from antisocial park users. Problems had escalated over the years and an example was given of a police officer refusing to act upon the report of antisocial abuse and drinking. Mr Ffloyd-Thurgood requested better signage around the Park, and a reduction in the grass height where it had grown long.

Councillor Sommers, Portfolio for Communities, gave assurances that she would raise the matters with the relevant Portfolio Holder, including the request for better signage, and would discuss with Cabinet the importance of good signage and the need to enforce rules.

Sir Bob Russell attended and addressed the Committee, pursuant to the provisions of Meetings Procedure Rule 5(1), beginning with an endorsement of the previous speaker's concerns. Sir Bob argued that nothing could be done if there was insufficient enforcement and stated that the Council had lost staff who had been working in Castle Park, totalling around 150 lost hours across the entire parks service. Sir Bob asked the purpose of the Committee, the meeting of which had not been mentioned at the most-recent Cabinet and Council meetings. Sir Bob noted that various churchyards in central Colchester were kept locked to deter antisocial behaviour, but accused the Council of seeking to create an area of antisocial behaviour by Holy Trinity Church, arguing that the area would be open all day every

day in the future. The Chairman noted Sir Bob's concerns, explained the role of the Committee (stemming from the Council's statutory duty to constitute a Crime and Disorder Committee) and gave his understanding that the grounds of Holy Trinity Church would be locked at night. Sir Bob disagreed with this interpretation of the plans for the churchyard and argued that historic gravestones would be under threat of damage.

A local resident [name withheld at resident's request] attended and addressed the Committee, pursuant to the provisions of Meetings Procedure Rule 5(1), raising concerns regarding antisocial behaviour at the St Mary's carpark. 300 incidences of such behaviour had been noted since they had moved near to the carpark in 2017, but only one notice had been issued in the first year of the vehicular Public Spaces Protection Act [PSPO]. Cars had been noted reaching speeds of 40mph in the carpark, with no preventative measures being taken. The problems occurring would cause reputational damage for Colchester, with its effect on visitor experiences. It was also bad for residents. The resident argued for a joined-up strategy to be drawn up, including prevention and enforcement, and asked how the Council could justify leaving the carpark open overnight, when only a few legitimate users parked there overnight.

The Chair gave assurance that the Cabinet and officers were aware of the issues raised, and that the meeting of this Committee would discuss enforcement of PSPOs, which included possible control mechanisms for carpark access. The Chair gave his preference for a 'pay on leaving' system and possible access restrictions overnight. Councillor Sommers, Portfolio for Communities, informed the Committee that Cabinet were looking at ways to prevent the issues reported, including barriers and closed-circuit television [CCTV] cameras. The Portfolio Holder had already discussed this with the Police's District Commander and was keen to resolve the problem, with a meeting with the local residents' association scheduled for the Thursday that week. The resident agreed that there was only so much the police could do, saying that the Council needed to act to use some of the ideas suggested and increase preventative measures.

Ms. Michelle Reynolds attended and addressed the Committee, pursuant to the provisions of Meetings Procedure Rule 5(1), representing 'Colchester Businesses Against Crime.' There was a national shoplifting epidemic at this time, with guards and members of shop staff being subjected to attacks. An estimated eight million shoplifting incidents had occurred since March 2023. The Police had recorded 329,000 incidents reported, with only around 45,000 investigated. Examples were given of attacks on staff who confronted thieves. One example resulted in police action to prosecute for shoplifting, but no action was taken regarding the violence used by the perpetrator. Groups of more than ten shoplifters were common, with even bigger groups seen by some retailers. Bike thieves operated in the City, stealing to order. There was no visible police presence, and thefts and street drinking did not face enforcement action. Confidence in the police had been lost, with many

incidents not reported due to the loss of confidence in the Police. Ms Reynolds called for a zero-tolerance approach to crime.

With the Chair's permission, a statement from Councillor Scordis was read out by the Clerk to the Committee. Councillor Scordis complimented front line police officers but criticised what was, in his view, a lack of leadership by the Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner [PFCC] and the Police District Commander. Councillor Scordis alleged a decline in policing standards and partnership working. Councillor Scordis stated that fewer Police were now seen, and that crime had worsened. Crime, antisocial behaviour and aggressive city-centre drinking were highlighted, with Councillor Scordis calling for Police leadership and a strategy to be developed to address reported problems.

The Chair gave his view that Councillor Scordis' criticism was unfair, even though some of the issues raised were worthy of discussion. The Chair noted factors which caused or exacerbated problems and increased the workload of the Police, as well as arguing that the Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Act (2022) contained provisions for more multi-agency work to be undertaken.

46. Safer Colchester Partnership Report

Councillor Tim Young attended and, with the approval of the Chair, addressed the Committee to praise the partnership working within the Safer Colchester Partnership [SCP]. Whilst acknowledging frustration felt by residents regarding issues being experienced, Councillor Young argued for more and better partnership working. Praising the work of the local Police Community Support Officer [PCSO] working in the Greenstead area, Councillor Young did raise concern that, whilst the PCSO responded to contacts, emails to Community Policing and the District Commander had gone unanswered. Calls to 101 had not led to a response and Councillor Young said that he could not recommend it as an option to residents. The District Commander was asked whether police officers were being properly deployed, with elected members and shop proprietors saying that they were not seeing Police support deployed. Antisocial behaviour was occurring across Colchester, with fear of crime a serious issue. Councillor Young asked why the situation had worsened and why, on occasion, people were told that all officers had been deployed to other areas, such as Southend. Councillor Young praised the deployment of resources to Greenstead, actioned by the PFCC, and informed the Committee that he would speak to the PFCC about the situation, explaining his wish to keep any criticism constructive.

Mr. Vincent Jeeves attended and addressed the Committee, pursuant to the provisions of Meetings Procedure Rule 5(1), in his capacity as the Business Crime Liaison Officer for the Colchester Business Improvement District [BID]. Mr Jeeves expressed the view that local businesses had lost confidence in the Police. The BID

tried to ensure that local businesses reported all crimes, but the level of crime had risen to a point at which this had become difficult. Mr Jeeves stated that he was aware of three crimes reported before he went on leave that had yet to receive a response, with others reported not then resulting in investigation. The Summer had seen an increase in antisocial behaviour [ASB] and Mr Jeeves asked if an impact assessment had been conducted on the deployments of police officers from Colchester to Southend, and the effect on Colchester. Mr Jeeves explained his work liaising with local businesses and gathering relevant data.

A Panel member noted that the Committee had a duty to examine the priorities of the Safer Colchester Partnership [SCP] and how they were set. The Panel member raised concern that the necessary detail to allow this had not been given in the report and requested that the Committee be shown the most recent Strategic Assessment which was used to formulate the SCP's priorities. The Committee could still discuss other elements of the SCP's work, but important content was missing, and strategic analysis was not present. Past reports showed Police priorities and how this mapped onto the priorities and work of the Partnership. The Panel member argued that the Committee needed the Strategic Assessment in order to judge if criticisms were justified, and that an extra meeting would potentially be needed to scrutinise this Assessment. Lisa Hobson, Community Safety and Safeguarding Officer, informed the Committee that the Strategic Assessment covered 1 October to 30 September and was based on data from all SCP partners, including the Police, and confirmed that the Strategic Assessment for the current year could be shared with the Committee.

The Partner representatives were asked to define what criminal activities fell under the definition of 'robbery', where these incidents were occurring, why they had increased and what the SCP's response had been. It was also asked if Colchester's crime rate could be compared to a wider range of other areas, such as Chelmsford, Braintree and Ipswich. One member asked if benchmarking could be done to compare Colchester to similar cities across Europe.

The Committee asked what other statistics could be added to the report, such as on hate crime, shoplifting or cybercrime. The partners were asked how the SCP tracked trends over time, how these were measured, and the impact of actions taken were measured and assessed.

Councillor Sommers, Portfolio Holder for Communities, thanked the SCP for its work and highlighted the positive stories within the report, from across a wide spectrum of work. The statistics showed that crime levels had reduced, but it was noted that perception of crime and individual experiences could differ from this. The Portfolio Holder urged all criminal issues to be reported, either by calling 999 or 101, or online (for non-urgent issues).

A presentation was given, covering the work of the SCP, and covering key data relating to crime and community safety. Chief Inspector Colin Cox, Police District

Commander, noted that the report provided to the Committee was based on the same format as the past year's report, and explained that more information or data could have been provided if SCP partners had been informed that it was wanted. The District Commander emphasised the prioritisation of dealing with serious offences, primarily of a violent and/or sexual nature, but appealed for all crimes to be reported to the Police. This helped to show the true level of crime in the Colchester area, and meant that greater Government funding could be accessed, if the true scale of crime was recorded.

Overall, crime had reduced by 7.5% as at the end of August 2023. The different categories of offences were covered, with robberies increasing due to Castle Park robberies carried out by young people. A number of these youths and their groomers had been arrested and charged, with some being remanded into custody. It was clarified that robberies were a personal use of, or threat of, violence was used to facilitate theft. This could encompass situations such as where one school pupil uses threat of violence to steal from another pupil, even where no weapons are involved.

Residential burglaries had reduced by 12.4% and were at the lowest level for six years. Business-related burglaries had reduced by 16.4%, with a massive prevention and enforcement operation having been carried out. Antisocial behaviour had dropped by 38.1%, with partnership working a key part in facilitating this reduction. 91.5 crimes per 1,000 people had been recorded. The District Commander explained that comparisons with other areas were possible, but cautioned that it was necessary to compare 'like with like'. Meaningful comparisons with somewhere such as Braintree were not possible, as Braintree did not have the night-time economy that Colchester operated.

A Panel member highlighted the public perception survey, ventured that the survey results did not seem to accord with the content of the SCP's report, and asked who had conducted the survey and who had participated. The District Commander confirmed that the survey was conducted by an independent third party, approaching people in the street, victims of crimes and members of the public on random 'phone calls. The survey did not note extensive dissatisfaction, with Colchester having the lowest crime rate in the County being supported by survey data.

The five main priorities of the Safer Colchester Partnership were covered, with an explanation of the work being done to address each one. The five priorities were:

- 1) Safeguard adults and children at risk of violence and exploitation
- 2) Tackle neighbourhood crime and anti-social behaviour
- 3) Support victims of domestic abuse and sexual offences and reduce violence against women and girls.
- 4) Develop early intervention and prevention to tackle the drivers of crime and reduce reoffending.
- 5) Work with communities to build resilience and promote safety.

The Partnership representatives were asked what was being done to be in contact with those who were hard to reach, including those for whom English was not the

first language. The work of the Colchester Independent Advisory Group was described, working to help the Police to meet and communicate with hard-to-reach communities and those who might be more likely than most to be victims of hate crime. The process for complaints about the Police was described. One officer was dedicated to engaging with families who had emigrated from African nations, and efforts were made to build trust with groups from a range of ethnic backgrounds.

The SCP representatives answered questions about safeguarding. Rita Jenner, Lead for Partnership Delivery [ECC] highlighted work to address risks by the Community Team, work to safeguard young people, and priorities set to help victims of sexual exploitation and to reduce exclusions from schools. Nathan Suley, CBH, explained the training given to front-line staff to identify hidden harms.

A Committee member asked whether the use of artificial intelligence [AI] had affected investigations and/or predictive analysis, and how the partnership made use of technology. The Police District Commander offered to seek information on this and provide an answer. Deputy Chief Constable Andrew Prophet noted that a range of work was being done on applications of AI to help officers, such as with disclosure reports to the Crown Prosecution Service and use in recruitment.

The Partner representatives were asked about enforcement of the City Centre PSPO by the Committee members, focusing on cracking down on aggressive begging and asking why enforcement was not more widespread. Andrew Tyrell, Head of Public Protection [the Council], explained that the Council could issue fines through the terms of the PSPO, and that this had been done in the past and helped to reduce problems. The Head of Public Protection agreed to take this to the Town Centre Team to discuss what could be done. The Police District Commander outlined Operation Luskan, with work to identify why individuals were begging, identify problems, give support and get people into recovery. It was noted that begging would have to be aggressive before penalty notices could be issued. The Lead for Partnership Delivery [ECC] argued that partners should not be afraid of using PSPO provisions, including the vehicular PSPO.

The Committee discussed City Centre ASB, with one member highlighting incidents where Council wardens had tried to prevent problems, but had not been able to get Police assistance. The SCP representatives were asked how better Police support could be obtained. The Police District Commander explained that the Townlink radio system, as used by Council wardens, was an information sharing system for the City Centre, not a way to report issues to the Police or seek assistance, as it produced no 'paper trail'. Calls for assistance would need to be made via 999, as this allowed the full range of necessary checks of intelligence/data, and checks as to whether specialist or armed officers were required. The problems with using the Townlink radio were described.

Requests for more Police officers and visibility were heard, with the District Commander noted that the survey work had shown that not all people wanted more

visibility from the Police, but agreed that he wanted more officers to do more work, but did not expect to get the resources needed to employ more officers. The 'Right care, right person' approach and prevention of issues helped to avoid the Police having to do things that other SCP partners should be doing.

A Committee member asked how the fear and perception of crime could be addressed, and whether people were not reporting incidents. The Head of Public Protection noted the Council's relationships with many organisations, seeing the mismatch between perception of crime and reality. The types of incident increasing were those driven by 'cost of living' issues. The situation had to be understood, then finding ways for support to be given to people. The overall situation in the UK had changed, leading to increased antisocial behaviour and shoplifting. A recent operation had led to six arrests for shoplifting. The Committee member argued that the SCP should do more to highlight the societal issues driving up crime like shoplifting, and to present this better to the public. Rita Jenner, Lead for Partnership Delivery [ECC], underlined the wider determinants of health and wellbeing, the effect of the 'cost of living' crisis, ways of looking at these across partnerships such as the NHS' Suffolk and North-East Essex Integrated Care Board (ICB). People could not afford food and turned to shoplifting. The Police District Commander intimated that the coming new Strategic Assessment could reflect the situation regarding shoplifting and antisocial behaviour against businesses, which would feed into the coming year's priorities. Some shoplifting was due to lack of income for individuals, whilst for other offenders, this was not the case. Police conducting enforcement action did not check as to the financial background of suspected offenders.

A Committee member asked why Police statistics showed a drop in reports of domestic abuse or violence of 11.6%, whilst other partners which worked with victims [such as Next Chapter] reported a significant increase in victims coming forward. The Committee member argued that the discrepancy meant that it was not possible to assess the performance of the SCP. The District Commander explained that the Police dealt with reported allegations of crime, but that some victims would not report offences to the Police. It was important to empower and support victims to report and act to counter the perpetrators. More domestic abuse cases were being solved than before. Beverley Jones, Chief Executive of Next Chapter, stated that it would help to have a common line to say that a drop in reported cases to the Police did not necessarily mean a reduction in the number of domestic abuse incidents.

The Chief Executive noted that an increase in reporting of domestic abuse incidents would not necessarily mean an increase in domestic abuse, as it may reflect a positive that people were more willing to come forward to report and get support. More people were seeking help from charities such as Next Chapter, seeking lives free from abuse. When supporting some victims, it was found that reporting offences to the Police was not always the best outcome for the individual. Some just wanted to pursue the rest of their lives, whilst trauma bonding may mean that some are reticent at seeking legal action. The lengthy criminal justice process, with current

long waiting times in the Courts Service, also sometimes dissuaded victims from reporting to the Police, with the possible stalling of their work to recover from abuse.

The Lead for Partnership Delivery [ECC] noted that North Essex had the highest number of adult mental health cases, highest rates of drug use and violence in all of Essex. The Deputy Chief Constable agreed, emphasising that it was a good thing for more victims of domestic abuse or violence to be getting support, likewise it was good for more perpetrators to be prosecuted, where the victim wanted to report and proceed.

The Committee discussed how it might be best to present the statistics relating to domestic abuse and violence, with the Chief Executive of Next Chapter arguing for publishing the statistic of victims assisted, alongside the Police's statistic of cases reported, as the Police statistics tended to get more coverage than others. The Chief Executive underlined that cases of abuse and violence were all crimes, even if not reported to the Police. Councillor Sommers, Portfolio Holder for Communities, underlined how complex domestic abuse could be, stating that it was important for the victims to do what was right for them and their families, especially bearing in mind the problems caused by the backlog and delays in the courts system. A Committee member urged that statistics relating to supporting victims be given as much consideration as statistics of incidents reported to the Police, with the performance of all relevant partners being assessed. Another member suggested that it would be worth scrutinising why victims did not wish to go to the Police to formally report domestic abuse or violence. The Deputy Chief Constable agreed and underlined the importance of the SCP's work in providing safety to residents, over and above any reported crime or antisocial behaviour.

The partnership work in reducing the drivers of crime and minimising reoffending was praised by the Chair, although a Committee member raised concern at comments he had received from Council Officers/Wardens, who had said that the Police were not sending officers to back them up when dealing with problem individuals. The Committee member noted Council Officer comments that Police deterrence was needed, using high-visibility patrols to help disperse people such as in the City Centre. The District Commander was asked what was needed to bring back Police patrols. The District Commander stated that patrols could be brought back, but direction was needed as to what was wanted. The Police could work with Council Wardens to identify problems. Partnership and information sharing would help to tackle problems. Frontline Police Officers met with Council Wardens regularly, but the District Commander pushed for higher-level meetings with management to set expectations for the Police and Wardens, followed by frontline staff meeting to liaise and work to meet expectations. Daily patrols were already carried out, every fifteen minutes in locations of concern.

The priority to 'work with communities to build resilience and promote safety' was discussed. A Committee member urged the Committee to make recommendations

which reflect the fact that the Business Improvement District [BID] were discontent with performance in this area.

It was noted that there was no mention of rural crime, such as theft of farming plant, and the Police were asked the extent to which they were engaged in preventing rural theft. The District Commander explained that the Rural Engagement Team worked with farmers, having the intelligence and equipment to engage and enforce to prevent crimes, also including hare coursing and illegal encampments. The Team provided advice and guidance to prevent theft, and monitored port operations to seek stolen equipment. It also worked to reassure rural communities and worked with local landowners. Intelligence was shared nationwide, in efforts to tackle thefts made to order.

The Committee discussed how it might be possible to reduce the amount of time officers had to spend on hospital cases, and whether engagement with the NHS could identify ways to achieve this. Mark Shorter, Head of Transformation (NEE Alliance [NHS]), explained that the Police worked with the hospital on this, emphasising the importance of working with the NHS to see how to reduce the demand on officer time. A mental health response vehicle had been commissioned, supported by the Police and by paramedics. This led to a decrease in trips to Accident and Emergency [A&E], and fewer emergencies. 236 people had been seen thus far, helping at least 134 who would otherwise have needed to be seen at A&E. Individuals were diverted to other services, where possible, such as crisis cafes. The NHS nationwide did not have beds in the numbers needed to meet demand for cases of mental health crisis. Work was ongoing by commissioning teams to try to address this. The Lead for Partnership Delivery [ECC] made a plea for the retention of priority five for the SCP, arguing that partnership would be vital to any future strategic plan.

The Chair summarised that there were a number of external factors hindering the SCP's work in Colchester, such as lack of housing, court backlogs and related problems. However, the Committee agreed that the Partnership seemed to be working well. A Committee member argued that there was a need for all partners to consider their corporate communications, especially bearing in mind the media coverage and public perception. Shoplifting remained a problem in the City Centre, with a public perception that this was not being addressed alongside the perception that there was a lack of presence by the Police and lack of PSPO enforcement.

The Chairman asked the SCP representatives what more the Council and Councillors could do to assist the Partnership. The Police District Commander asked Councillors to encourage residents to report all crime to the Police. Nathan Suley, Community Safety Manager [CBH], agreed and asked Councillors to promote self-help measures to residents, including ways to build better relationships within neighbourhoods. Beverley Jones, Chief Executive of Next Chapter, asked Councillors to become Domestic Abuse Ambassadors, learning how to identify potential abuse and violence and to direct victims to organisations which could

support them. The Chairman suggested that the Council may be able to run a training session for Councillors to cover these suggestions and domestic abuse and violence matters. The Lead for Partnership Delivery [ECC] promoted early intervention and partnership to deal with problems before they became acute.

RESOLVED that the CRIME AND DISORDER COMMITTEE: -

- a) Concurs that the Safer Colchester Partnership is dealing well with its priorities
- b) Holds an additional meeting, within the next six months, to scrutinise the Strategic Assessment document of the Safer Colchester Partnership for the coming year, and to receive benchmarking data against a wider selection of different geographic areas, and an explanation of the divergence of domestic abuse statistics compiled by different partner organisations.

RECOMMENDED to the SAFER COLCHESTER PARTNERSHIP that: -

- a) Enhanced efforts be made by all relevant Safer Colchester Partnership partners to enforce the City Centre and vehicular Public Spaces Protection Orders [PSPOs];
- b) Whilst the Crime and Disorder Committee concurs that the Safer Colchester Partnership is dealing well with its priorities, a clearer place within its priorities should be found for addressing fraud, knife crime, shoplifting and other crimes against businesses.