

CRIME AND DISORDER COMMITTEE

14 September 2021

Present:- Councillor Barton, Councillor Bourne, Councillor Chapman, Councillor Cory, Councillor Loveland, Councillor Whitehead, Councillor Willetts, Councillor Wood

Substitutes:-

Also Present:- Councillor B. Oxford.

35. Minutes of previous meetings.

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting held on 16 February 2021 be confirmed as a correct record.

36. Safer Colchester Partnership

Pam Donnelly, Chair of the Safer Colchester Partnership [SCP] 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. It was explained that an updated Appendix A had been provided for this report in order to give expanded detail regarding the Partnership's work and performance. Thanks were given to Colchester's policing team for continuing to provide updates on key issues and for liaising with the Council and members of the Partnership.

The new operating arrangements for the SCP were noted, with the SCP now operating within the 'One Colchester' Partnership, which linked and addressed economic and health issues with issues of community safety. The SCP remained as a statutory body, but now located within a wider partnership. The Partnership maintained a flexible approach to planning, in order to adapt to new challenges.

It was noted that the Adult Partnership Plan had been updated and the agenda contained reporting on planning, outcomes and observable benefits.

Chief Inspector Rob Huddleston, Colchester's District Commander, provided an update on the issues tackled by the Police. Overall crime rates had been 5.8% lower than as recorded at the same point in 2020, and statistics were given for the changes in crime rates for the different types of incidents. The Committee were informed that there had been a rise in reporting of harassment, stalking and hate crime incidents. Essex Police had adopted a gender-based hate crime approach and ambassadors had been appointed across the District, with new ways to engage being sought, including within schools.

Work on addressing hidden harms was detailed, with work conducted to help vulnerable individuals in cooperation with the local Safeguarding Board. Separate

work was conducted with repeat offenders and also with victims. Tackling Domestic abuse remained a key priority for the Police. Same-day targeted responses maximised the chance to successfully engage with victims.

The District's figures showed that 87.2 crimes had been reported per 1,000 residents during the relevant period. This placed Colchester District as sixth out of twelve districts in Essex, which was felt to be a good result given Colchester's status as a major population centre.

It was noted that the reporting of incidents relating to serious violence or exploitation had led to the Police setting up a specific team to address and investigate these. Raptor Team successes were listed, including the identification and disabling of 'phone numbers used for purposes of selling drugs. Sixteen County Lines had been focussed upon, with ten involving joint working with the Metropolitan Police. Local dealers had also been targeted, and safeguarding officers introduced to Raptor Teams to work with partners to identify vulnerable individuals and children. Work was also increased to carry out signposting to partner organisations who could help and support vulnerable individuals and drug users.

The use of 'stop and search' powers was detailed, with an intelligence-led approach continuing to be used and a reduction in the number of stops recorded. 8% of individuals stopped and searched were from black British demographics, roughly in line with the respective percentages of the overall population. A Police Scrutiny Panel had been set up and opened up to the public to oversee matters which included the use of 'stop and search' powers. A Committee member queried whether there would be any pressure to change stop and search tactics, should the intelligence-led approach lead to a disproportionate percentage of searches being carried out on certain demographics. The Chief Inspector underlined the key to ensure that stops and search use were proportionate. If the intelligence-led approach led to issues, the intelligence generated and used to guide stop and search use would need to be scrutinised to see if any unconscious bias was at play and whether intelligence generated was sufficiently quality assured. The assessment of the provenance of intelligence was outlined.

The Committee were informed that the rate of antisocial behaviour [ASB] incidents being recorded had increased by 22.4% compared to the comparable point in the previous year, but it was emphasised that these included all issues, incidents and tickets relating to Covid 19 and the enforcement of Covid 19 restrictions.

Multi-agency work continued, aimed at addressing alcoholism and aggressive begging. Problematic tenants also continued to be engaged with to support them to address issues and difficulties. Officers now worked until 4am to better cover the night-time economy and any related incidents. Violent crimes remained at a relatively low rate, even with a large increase in the number of people engaging with the night-time economy.

The Police continued to work with communities, businesses and individuals across town and rural areas. Community police work had increased after the end of lockdown, including youth engagement work and efforts to increase engagement with hard-to-reach demographics. Efforts were afoot to further develop youth engagement sessions carried out in partnership with Colchester United, and a YMCA youth worker now joined patrols to assist in engagement. Likewise, work continued

alongside the Fire Service to address ASB hotspots and engage with communities. Local festivals and community events were attended regularly.

The Rural Engagement Team looked at ways to tackle fly tipping, hare coursing and other rural-specific issues, proactively looking to prevent rural crime. More waterway patrols were now possible, with a new craft having been obtained. The Rural Crime Toolkit had continued to be advertised to Parish and Town Councils. A Committee member raised concerns that the perception was that rural communities got a slower and worse Police response than urban areas, and the view that news and information should be disseminated to Parish Councils so that they could be spread through communities.

The Chief Inspector gave assurance that work continued to engage to improve communications and perceptions in rural communities, including use of the monthly update to Parish Councils. Community Support Officers spent much time spreading information and news throughout communities. A high-visibility presence was being maintained, including speed checks and operations to crack down in areas where speeding is a significant cause of ASB. TruCAM fixed cameras were in use to gather evidence and neighbourhood watch schemes were encouraged and supported. The Committee discussed this and the Chief Inspector noted that, before a camera can be placed, a certified officer had to do a site visit, determine whether it was appropriate and then recommend a camera be sited where this was so.

The Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner [PFCC] was encouraging a scheme for special officers in villagers and had been keen for this to be rolled out. Some issues still needed resolving, with an example being that equipment such as pepper sprays could currently only be stored within Police Stations. Recruitment of special officers nevertheless continued to be pursued. The Chief Inspector was asked whether any plans were in motion to find alternative, more convenient, places for such equipment to be stored away from Police stations, including any potential for secure home storage. The Chief Inspector outlined the PFCC's work to find a solution for this problem. There was no current alternative to storage in Police stations as changes to legislation would be required in order to allow any alternatives.

A specific question as to policing of river-based issues on the Stour led to the answer that Essex Police worked with the Fire and Rescue Service, which took the lead on addressing river-based work. Essex Police liaised with Suffolk Police regarding issues on the Stour. Further details were promised for the Member who raised the question, from both the Police and from Quentin Sage of the Fire and Rescue Service.

The Chief Inspector was asked for his experiences of how Covid-19 had affected partnership work, and for information on any lessons learnt from this. The Committee were told that the Police had worked closely with existing partners and the strong Town Centre Team, covering private and public sector partners. This work continued, including with the Council's Licensing Team and the SOS Bus, amongst others. The pandemic had shown the strength of local partnership working, and good levels of public cooperation had resulted in a very low rate of tickets being issued for non-compliance with Covid-19 regulations. The Police had increased their involvement with public health meetings.

The Police's work on tackling County Lines was praised, and a request was made for further actions which could be taken in the future. The Committee were told that future focus would remain on identifying vulnerable individuals victimised by the drug trade, detailing the partnership approach with housing providers. Exploitation would continue to be identified and addressed. The unit addressing violent crime and vulnerable individuals would continue to work with partner organisations with experience of getting vulnerable individuals to safety and out of exploitation. Partnership working with relevant academic experts would continue so as to ensure that future approaches remained based on best evidence and research.

It was queried whether any further measures could be introduced to further ensure that racial bias issues were avoided.

More detail was requested regarding the approach to tackling gender-based hate crime.

The Chief Inspector was asked how officers addressed ASB issues where the perpetrators and victims were children, and whether there was anything more that the Council could do to assist the Police in its youth engagement efforts. The Chief Inspector emphasised the importance of youth engagement, in schools and with other partners. The approach used covered primary and secondary schools, as well as college level institutions.

Crime and Public Protection Command continued to target cases of suspected exploitation, and the common causes of such cases were listed. A dedicated online team had worked to reduce online exploitation. When malefactors were found to be young people, the first approach was to try to stop the behaviour in question, rather than necessarily to immediately seek to criminalise them. Significant additional funding for youth services and support had been obtained via the Town Deal, within the overall funding for the Deal of over £18m.

The Partners were asked to describe any effects caused by the merging of probation services.

The Committee queried why several standard paragraphs (on Equality and Diversity, Community Safety, Health and Safety and Risk Management) stated that there were no specific implications in those areas, given the issues raised within the report and the information given at the meeting. The Chairman clarified that the report itself detailed the implications relating to some, and that these paragraphs did not specify implications as this item did not involve decision making on the part of the Committee. The Committee were given assurance that, although most of the standard paragraphs did not need content for the above reasons, future reports would include full content in the section relating to Equality and Diversity implications.

The Chief Inspector was asked how approaches could be expanded to make enforcement actions against antisocial behaviour work more effectively, and how processes could be improved to make them more victim-friendly. Mel Rundle, Communities Group Manager, gave assurances regarding the multi-agency partnership approaches taken to tackling antisocial behaviour, including use of Public Spaces Protection Orders and the Council's work, through the Environmental Protection Team, to address issues such as noise complaints. The Safer Colchester

Partnership continued to support communities in finding ways to tackle and reduce antisocial behaviour.

Views were requested as to what effect a Youth Zone may have on potentially reducing antisocial behaviour by young people, and whether any assessment had been carried out as to potential effects of the expected ending of the £20 uplift to the rate of Universal Credit payments. The Committee were informed that the Town Deal Board were unable to progress a Youth Zone project at this time due to factors such as a lack of site and the need to identify ongoing revenue funding, but were keen on doing this in the future, alongside improving existing facilities. More information would be provided to the Scrutiny Panel at its meeting in February 2022.

The Chair of the Safer Colchester Partnership informed the Committee that senior Council officers continued to conduct meetings with representatives of the local Clinical Commissioning Group to discuss issues such as the end of the £20 uplift to Universal Credit, increased prices, ending of furlough, amongst others. A Partnership Plan was being drafted to address and mitigate likely consequences stemming from these.

The Committee asked for detail as to any new requirements from the Domestic Abuse Act 2021 and how partners were working to meet them. Beverley Jones, Chief Executive of the charity 'Next Chapter' explained that the Act introduced a statutory definition for domestic abuse, as well as giving a wider legal definition than had previously been in use. Children were now recorded as victims in their own right and there was a lowering of the minimum age of abuse by a partner to sixteen years of age. The position of Domestic Abuse Commissioner was now codified to be a statutory role, and the domestic abuse scheme was now on a statutory footing.

Another change within the Domestic Abuse Act was that a 'rough sex' defence was now not permitted in cases involving homicide or violence. The Act placed a statutory duty on Tier One local authorities to support victims and children and sets minimum standards for sheltered accommodation/sanctuary housing and a guarantee that tenancy rights would be maintained for those fleeing domestic abuse and violence, as well as detailing types of support to be provided for victims. Tier Two local authorities [such as the Council] had a duty to cooperate with Tier One authorities carrying out their statutory duties.

Regarding the Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Bill, a Committee Member raised concerns regarding its potential effects on civil liberties and its potential difficulty to enforce. Chief Inspector Huddleston was asked if he could provide any reassurance as to the effects it might have on civil liberties. Chief Inspector Huddleston explained that he was not able to comment on Bills which were before Parliament and yet to be enacted.

The use of Public Space Protection Orders was then discussed Pam Donnelly, Chair of the Safer Colchester Partnership, emphasised the importance of maintaining the rights of members of the public and gave assurance that enforcement measures, such as the current use of Public Space Protection Orders [PSPOs], were only used where the Police and relevant partners were convinced of a necessity existing. The Committee were informed that a holistic approach was used to ensure that residents and visitors felt supported. Where individuals were in breach of PSPOs, the first approach was to provide support, e.g., for street beggars, to address and end any

infractions or problematic behaviour, with enforcement only commencing where such efforts are unsuccessful. The Police and SCP partners continued to work with both perpetrators and victims of breaches of PSPOs. Tributes were paid to the outgoing Neighbourhood Watch coordinator, Graham Stehle, and the Committee were assured that the Police investigated criminal offences, and worked with partners to address non-criminal antisocial behaviour. The Council had adopted 'Community Can' principles to address problems within the Borough.

The Panel and guests discussed the important focus on prevention of suicide. The Chair of the Safer Colchester Partnership emphasised the work done in this area, addressing the fact that the Colchester and Tendring area had the third-highest rates of suicide in the country. Members' development sessions were being held on this to inform and guide councillors on how this was being addressed and to help councillors identify possible signs of self-harm/suicide risk and help residents find and contact providers of help.

The Committee asked whether any future Nights of Action were scheduled. Mel Rundle, Communities Group Manager, explained that one had already been held and promised to check as to whether more were being planned. The Partnership continued to monitor and discuss town centre issues experienced since the end of lockdown. Details of Nights of Action were not usually published in advance, as the exercise sought to obtain a good representative picture of the night time economy in Colchester, without pre-warning people that it would be taking place.

The Safer Colchester Partnership partners were asked, regarding the vulnerable who were more likely to suffer from crime, whether they would be able to keep up their efforts and resourcing in order to maintain levels of support for those members of the public who were in positions of vulnerability. Additional questions were asked to gain insight into how partners carried out succession planning for key posts, to ensure that any staffing changes did not lessen the strength of partnership working and to ensure the Partnership had the maximum positive impact on people's lives. The Chair of the Safer Colchester Partnership clarified that the Partnership's resources were reliant on a small budget from the Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner, successful bids for external funding and on the committing of resources by the statutory and non-statutory partners. The Partnership relied upon the resources and goodwill of its partners. Regarding succession planning, the Chair gave examples of partnership teams working together, such as 'tactical cell' meetings to discuss problems and tactics to address them. The depth of knowledge and experience in those teams acted as a mitigation against staff/volunteer turnover.

The Committee discussed the Youth Offending Service and its work. Lee Bailey, Lead for Partnership Delivery - Children & Families [Essex County Council], informed the Committee that a substantive report had been compiled on project work relating to youth offending which had run for two years, working with those who were or had been in the youth justice system, gaining their views and experiences whilst helping them to move forward. The report stage had been completed and workshop work was now to be commenced. More details would be available for the Committee's members following this meeting and the Committee requested that details and the report be circulated to all councillors in the Borough, with advice given to ensure that councillors knew and used the correct language when talking of sensitive issues, including vulnerable young people and hidden harms. The Chair of the Safer Colchester Partnership agreed to look to provide a full members' briefing on this

subject once the report was formally published. Councillor Beverley Oxford, Portfolio Holder for Communities, agreed that engagement was vital, and that information gathered should inform the Partnership's approaches and strategies. The Portfolio Holder praised the improved cooperative approaches used, compared to the past isolated actions used.

A Committee member raised the cultural influences and causes of domestic abuse/violence, abuse of children and hate crime, including gender-related hate crimes, and emphasised the importance of tackling cultural influences which exacerbated criminal and antisocial behaviour. The Chair of the Safer Colchester Partnership gave assurance that the partners were fully engaged with this and that a full briefing was likely to be brought to the One Colchester Partnership in the future.

The Committee discussed the importance of scrutinising the whole Partnership, beyond just the work of the Police, and the need to judge how effectiveness is perceived by the public, in addition to the perception generated amongst councillors.

A member of the Committee asked for comparison of local crime rates with those of other areas, to be told which local area had the lowest crime rates and whether it was possible to have data on conviction rates. The Committee were told that the lowest crime rates had been recorded in Rochford, of 48.8 crimes reported per 1,000 population, and it was noted that Rochford had a population roughly a third the size of Colchester's. The Colchester conviction rate currently stood at around 19% but that conviction rates were dependent on a number of factors, including the numbers of cases where a positive outcome could be achieved via restorative justice instead of convictions.

The Partner representatives were asked what alternatives were considered to the current structure and practices of the Partnership. The Committee further asked how the efficacy of the Partnership's work and direction of travel could be scrutinised without measurable outputs being provided, and whether it was possible to measure effectiveness and impacts on residents.

The Chair of the Partnership assured the Committee that the Partnership was constantly open to learn and adopt new ideas and approaches. An example was the moving of the Partnership under the overall umbrella of the One Colchester Partnership, to ensure that community safety was considered within the wider context including health and wellbeing and economic factors. Matrix working was difficult, due to the reliance on goodwill and cooperation between members, however this was being practiced in Colchester. There were very few quantitative measures that could be used to judge performance. If more resources were available, then more metrics could be measured. The Partnership continued to focus its limited resources where they could be shown to produce the greatest benefits. All the outcomes shown within the report were based upon evidence, qualitative evidence where quantitative evidence was not available. The Chief Inspector expanded upon this to give assurance that outcome effectiveness was judged on complex statistical analysis and the judgement of experienced professionals. As an example, the 'solve' rate for crimes in Colchester stood at 16.27%, compared to a rate of 13.8% for Essex as a whole. Many offences presented no investigative opportunities

A Committee member asked whether a business case had been prepared and considered before the migration of the Safer Colchester Partnership [SCP] under the

oversight of the One Colchester Partnership, and whether details of that decision were available for scrutiny. It was queried whether it would have been more proper for the Crime and Disorder Committee to scrutinise that proposed decision. The Chair of the Partnership explained that the statutory role of the Partnership remained a constant. Quarterly reports were provided to the One Colchester Partnership to cover the work of the Safer Colchester Partnership and its delivery groups. The placing of the SCP under the One Colchester Partnership allowed a holistic approach to be taken to its community safety work and allowed for greater partnership working with organisations such as the local Clinical Commissioning Group. The SCP remained subject to oversight by the Crime and Disorder Committee. Regarding whether the change should have been examined by this Committee, it was explained that the linking of the SCP with the One Colchester Partnership had not changed its terms of reference, its statutory role or fundamental structure. The Chair of the SCP offered to bring the overall work of the One Colchester Partnership, and its relation to the SCP, to a future meeting of the Scrutiny Panel. The Committee welcomed this and agreed to this being scheduled for a Panel meeting which would take place on 15 February 2022, replacing a scheduled meeting of the Crime and Disorder Committee.

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) An item be tabled for a future Scrutiny Panel meeting on 15 February 2022 for the Panel to scrutinise the work of the 'One Colchester' Partnership, and its relationship to, and governance arrangements linked with, the Safer Colchester Partnership, which sits within it.