

CRIME AND DISORDER COMMITTEE

24 AUGUST 2010

Present :- Councillor Christopher Arnold (Chairman)
Councillors Nigel Chapman, Mark Cory, Bill Frame,
Theresa Higgins, Nigel Offen, Gerard Oxford,
Dennis Willetts and Julie Young

Also in Attendance :- Councillor Tim Young

3. Minutes

The minutes from the meetings held on 24 August 2009 and 19 May 2010 were confirmed as a correct record.

Councillor Nigel Chapman and Councillor Nigel Offen (in respect of being a member of the Board of Colchester Borough Homes) declared a personal interest in the following item pursuant to the provisions of Meetings General Procedure Rule 7(3)

Councillor John Bouckley, Councillor Nigel Chapman, Councillor Bill Frame, Councillor Theresa Higgins, Councillor Nigel Offen, Councillor Gerard Oxford and Councillor Julie Young (in respect of being a member of their local Neighbourhood Action Panel) declared a personal interest in the following item pursuant to the provisions of Meetings General Procedure Rule 7(3)

Councillor Theresa Higgins (in respect of her membership of Essex County Council) declared a personal interest in the following item pursuant to the provisions of Meetings General Procedure Rule 7(3)

4. Safer Colchester Partnership

Mr. Ian Vipond, Executive Director and Chairman of the Colchester's Responsible Authorities Group (RAG) introduced the report on the work and progress of the Safer Colchester Partnership (SCP), formally the Colchester Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnership.

Mr. Vipond said he believed the new partnership name was better for the public to understand, and the duties largely remained constant. The main change was that probationary activities now formed part of the Partnership's statutory duties. He believed future funding issues could bring further changes, though it is clear that partnerships will continue to focus on crime reduction.

Mr. Vipond concluded by saying it had been a good year for the partnership, though future budget restraints will bring new challenges.

Councillor Tim Young, Portfolio Holder for Housing and Community Safety addressed the Panel to speak about the achievements over the last year of the SCP.

Councillor T. Young spoke about the sterling work of 'SOS Bus' and 'Days of Action' projects, both going from strength to strength and a regular feature of what Colchester Borough Council does within the partnership. The effect of the 'Safer Colchester Project' in three local areas had been outstanding, realising a remarkable reductions in anti-social behaviour, youth nuisance, decreased crime and much greater community engagement, and the 'Crucial Crew' project was now blossoming, providing advice and information to primary school children with events held at the Community Stadium.

Councillor T. Young said he believed the relationship between Colchester Borough Council and Essex Police was as strong now as it had ever been in his twenty years as a local councillor. He appreciated not everything was perfect with the work of the Neighbourhood Action Panels (NAP), but it was improving, and a lot was achieved at the most recent NAP Representatives meeting.

Ms. Alison Newcomb, Chief Superintendent of the local constabulary, a role she had taken up in May of this year, addressed the panel and spoke of her aspirations as Eastern Divisional Commander.

Ms. Newcomb wished for the Eastern Division to be the best performing division in Essex and wanted to improve the satisfaction of victims of crime who make contact with the Police. The development of strong partnerships was paramount to a reduction in crime and anti-social behaviour and the partnership in Colchester was very good and should be commended for what it had achieved.

The Eastern Division was performing well, with a 3% reduction in current overall reported crime instances (though there had been a slight increase in burglaries within this overall figure), whilst other divisions are experiencing an increase.

Ms. Newcomb concluded by saying she was proud of the achievements of the partnership, and would endeavour to maintain the services whilst improving policy standards despite the inevitable future financial pressures.

In response to Councillor Willetts and the possible need for this Committee to review all four parts of Crime and Disorder assessment as noted within the Home Office Directive, Mr. Vipond said it was entirely the gift of the Committee as to the scope of reviews and the frequency of meetings in each year, though there was a statutory need to meet at least once per year. Mr. Vipond said whilst the report within the agenda did not provide all the information as stated in the Home Office Circular it was a summary that concentrated on the key issue results that are contributing to driving down crime and what it does for the people of Colchester. Mr. Vipond said he would be willing to provide all the information that is available if that is what the Committee wished, though as Chairman of RAG he said all members are involved in all four parts of the Home Office Directive.

Councillor Willetts said it would be helpful for the Committee in the future to receive a short summary of the work achieved within the four parts of the directive.

Councillor Offen said the report was admirable, giving members a good idea of the overall picture, and partners should be congratulated on reducing crime.

Councillor J. Young, in reference to the comments made by Councillor Willetts said members do get a constant stream of updates and information from Mr. Peter Carrington, Community Safety Co-ordinator for the Council and RAG, with the opportunity to give feed back, a point later endorsed by Councillor T. Higgins.

Councillor Arnold understood that other local authorities did meet more frequently, but for many parts of the Country crime and disorder was a more prominent issue. Councillor Arnold said he would be interested to know what Colchester was doing to tackle the underlying perception of residents who feel the Town Centre is an unsafe place during the evening.

Ms. Newcomb said the partnership was working collectively to reassure residents that the town centre in the evening was a safe place to visit, with increased patrols (visibility) on busy evenings. Ms. Newcomb said there was no specific data available that was a measure of resident perception and if crime reduces and the perceptions remain we have missed a trick. The partnership remains focused on tackling this issue regardless of whether or not there is an issue.

Later, in response to Councillor Willetts, who suggested the promotion of the SOS Bus may give the wrong perception, Mr. Vipond said the way in which we promote initiatives, that in effect, reduce potential crime and disorder was vitally important, and if we get it right, more visitors will come to Colchester. It was vital that we found sound different ways of measuring perception.

Councillor T. Young said a report from the Policy Panel's task and finish group work on the town centre night time economy would be submitted to Cabinet shortly. Mr. Vipond said this was an opportunity to do some holistic work in the town centre particularly around the evening time, to better understand perceptions.

In response to Councillor Offen and the data provided around Essex Trading Standards, Ms. Newcomb said she was not overly concerned, that whilst it suggested ETS needed to do more testing the sample size of the data was small. Ms. Newcomb reiterated that whilst there was not a prominent issue with the sale of alcohol and tobacco to underage people (Councillor T. Young said supermarkets are now tough on this issue with staff drilled on sales procedure), it does happen, though she emphasised there was not an issue with knives, a point confirmed by Mr. Peter Carrington. Mr. Vipond said RAG would like to see a tougher approach and action against those businesses that breach licensing rules on the sale of alcohol and tobacco, with the Police taking a more collaborative approach, a point later acknowledged by Ms. Newcomb, who said she would consider the future approach by the Police. Councillor Arnold and Offen agreed that these comments should be fed back to RAG with a view to increasing sample sizes and improving the accuracy of results.

In terms of the perception of safety, Councillor J. Young wondered what it would be in regards to reducing street lighting at night as part of public sector funding cuts. Mr. Vipond said RAG would shortly be considering this issue, but it was a wish that good lighting would be provided as now, on all main routes out of the town centre. The future would be to make a more efficient use of lighting. It was imperative that good lighting

remained in the town centre, it was a question of how to provide this in an effective way e.g. more efficient lighting / producing independent energy sources. Councillor Oxford later commented that for the safety of people with mobility problems, that at night, areas such as crossings with dropped curbs are adequately lit. Later, Ms. Newcomb said she intended to ensure she would have some influence over any decision to reduce street lighting.

Councillor T. Young said an example of 'Days of Action' doing an excellent job was that at Tiptree, where Wilkins, a large local family business, had provided a staff social room for the setting up of a local youth club, and where over 100 youths now visit each week. Voluntary workers provide the support to keep the project running, which Mr. Vipond said was the classic example of the local community taking up the challenge to take the project forward, with the support of the partner organisations.

Councillor T. Higgins said visiting students to Colchester had commented to her how difficult it was to gain entry or purchase goods without identification of age, confirming that firm action against license holders did have a positive effect. In regards to the Colchester Project, Councillor Higgins said she would welcome greater communication with ward councillors in New Town to provide a more co-ordinated effective weekend clean. Councillor T. Young said he would take away these comments for future consideration.

In response to Councillor Chapman, Ms. Newcomb said the policing of rural areas remained though a low profile was maintained. Generally, the crime rates in rural areas remained very low and it was during rural patrols that outlying resources are drawn back into urban areas. Ms. Newcomb said there had been a slight reduction in hate crime (of those instances reported to the Police), usually against minority groups such as gays and lesbians. It is hoped that tackling this sort of crime would improve through the implementation of third party reporting. Councillor G. Oxford later said disabled people are as much affected by hate crime as ethnic and gay groups, a view understood and supported by Ms. Newcomb.

Councillor Bouckley said NAP is very successful at Mersea, but he wondered why representatives are not named in the minutes of each meeting. Ms. Newcomb said names should be recorded and she would ensure this would happen in future. Also in response to Councillor Bouckley, Ms. Newcomb said there are solutions to the problems of anti-social groups causing a problem, being moved on and causing problems elsewhere. If these problems are reported to the Police they will act upon, speaking to parents if necessary or as a last resort, issuing anti-social contracts. Councillor T. Young confirmed to Councillor Bouckley that the partnership is aware of the high proportion of prisoners that are former servicemen, usually with psychological problems as a result of their work in the armed forces, and the Essex Probation Service do work closely with the armed services to help find solutions to these problems. Councillor Young said he would take this issue up with the garrison commander as part of the work of the Colchester2020 partnership. There however remained the overall problem with prisons, with so many prisoners with alcohol and mental health issues, with a new approach to the prison service needed to reduce the overall prison population.

In response to Councillor Frame, Ms. Newcomb understood the concern for the high national rate of undetected crime, but Colchester did pride itself on an excellent current detection rate of 28%, though it was hoped this would increase to meet this year's target of 30%. Ms. Newcomb said there was a lot of activity around dwelling burglary with officers dedicating time to following up the initial contact made by the Police, and focusing on offenders who steal to finance their dependency on misuse of drugs and alcohol.

Councillor T. Young responded to Councillor Oxford in respect of a local resident, a victim of anti-social behaviour, who he believed had been badly let down by the Anti-Social Behaviour Team at Colchester Borough Homes (CBH), suggesting he speaks about this isolated case to Councillor Chapman, who as a Board Member of CBH could help to provide a more satisfactory outcome.

In response to Councillor Willetts about credit card fraud, Ms. Newcomb said if a credit card crime is reported to the Police they will deal with, and are working in partnership with the banks to resolve fraud. Mr. Vipond also confirmed to Councillor Willetts that whilst the SCP relies on a highly complex network of partner agencies on project delivery, for instance, working with the North East Essex Multi-Faith Forum supports greater community cohesion and crime reduction, there was no suggestion that these groups or forums are in some way connected to crime. As part of the Government initiative on tackling terrorism, it is essential to ensure that a variety of partnership groups have the ability to communicate with individuals to persuade them of peaceful solutions to their concerns. Councillor T. Young said the network of partner agencies was part of the county wide strategy to engage with minority communities and get a better understanding of their needs and concerns.

RESOLVED that the committee considered and noted the current work and progress of the Safer Colchester Partnership (SCP) formerly known as the Crime & Disorder Reduction Partnership.