

Medway Council
REGENERATION, COMMUNITY AND CULTURE
OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

16 February 2010

6:30 pm to 8:50 pm

RECORD OF THE MEETING

PRESENT:

Committee members: Councillors Bhutia, Bright (Vice-Chairman in the Chair), Crack, Godwin, Tony Goulden, Griffin, Hewett, Hicks and Maisey

Substitute members: Councillor Avey (for Councillor Andrews)
Councillor Mrs Diane Chambers (for Councillor Hunter (Chairman))
Councillor Harriott (for Councillor Hubbard)
Councillor Juby (for Councillor Stamp)

In attendance: Rose-Anne Cook, Graduate Trainee, Medway Council
Robin Cooper, Director of Regeneration, Community and Culture
Chief Superintendent Steve Corbishley, Chairman of the Community Safety Partnership and Area Commander, Kent Police
Councillor Doe, Portfolio Holder for Community Services
Angela Drum, Head of Legal Services
Richard Hicks, Assistant Director Customer First, Leisure, Culture, Democracy and Governance
Neil Howlett, Strategic Partnership Manager
Detective Chief Inspector Mick Judge, Kent Police
Superintendent Des Keers, Kent Police
Julie Keith, Head of Democratic Services
Susie Latta, Policy Research Officer, Kent Police Authority
Andy McGrath, Assistant Director Frontline Services

603 RECORD OF THE MEETING

The record of the meeting of 13 January 2010 was agreed and signed as correct.

Members asked for an update on the recommendations set out in minute 511 (Petition – Station Road, Strood). Members were advised that traffic police had suggested that in future, any on-site accident investigation into a death or serious injury should include one of the council's road engineers, so that the council had early notice of possible reasons and outcomes of that accident and location. Officers advised that this was a good idea and would accept this offer.

With regard to Station Road, Strood, the police had advised that this was an on-going investigation and disclosure as to possible reasons would not be forthcoming until the investigation had concluded. Officers were hoping to report to the following meeting on the other recommendations.

604 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Andrews, Hubbard, Hunter (Chairman) and Stamp.

605 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor Godwin declared a personal interest in agenda item 5(A) Scrutiny of the Community Safety Partnership as he is a Member of Kent Police Authority, although he retained his right to speak on this item.

606 URGENT MATTERS

The Vice-Chairman advised that there were no urgent matters but informed the Committee that the Leader would be held to account on 18 March 2010.

607 SCRUTINY OF THE COMMUNITY SAFETY PARTNERSHIP

Discussion:

The Vice-Chairman welcomed the Chairman of the Community Safety Partnership (CSP) and senior officers from Kent Police to the meeting.

Regeneration, Community and Culture, 16 February 2010

The Chairman of the partnership gave a presentation setting out the background to how the partnership had originally been set up compared to how it currently operated, together with why Medway was now a safer place to live, work and play in than ever before. The presentation covered the following points:

- a 18.5% reduction in all crime in Medway in the last year with 3,000 less recorded offences;
- that public perception in Medway (measured by the British Crime Survey) was out of step with reality;
- serious violent crime was down by 50% and burglaries down by 29%;
- feedback to communities included the “You said, we did” campaign;
- that various further work was required, particularly around public perception of community safety issues;
- that future plans included broader work across the Local Strategic Partnership (LSP) agenda, particularly with health colleagues, for example working with dysfunctional families where the children were at risk of developing a criminal lifestyle.

The Committee thanked the Chairman of the Community Safety Partnership for his presentation and asked questions, including the following:

- Could the Community Safety Partnership identify areas of good practice, or concern, with regard to PACTs (Partners and Communities Together) as the Committee was soon to commence an in-depth review into their effectiveness and future role?

The Chairman of the CSP responded that this was a very timely review but reminded Members that PACTs were only one part of police engagement with local communities. The issues raised via PACT meetings had to be considered in conjunction with issues raised via other methods of public engagement in each area.

- Information was requested on the operation of the SOS bus (which

Regeneration, Community and Culture, 16 February 2010

provided a safe haven for people suffering the effects of drugs or alcohol, offering first aid and advice).

Officers responded that the SOS bus was based mainly in Rochester, as this was the hub of the night time economy. During the daytime it was taken to schools and retail outlets or hired out. An anonymous survey was kept of the people who used it which had shown that it had already saved two people's lives. Members were also advised of a new project called 'HOUSE' which had been extremely successful elsewhere. It would be a place for young people to visit and would enable the partnership to offer services, such as sexual health assessments and pregnancy services, etc. A previous scheme in another local authority had seen 150,000 young people use the facility in the first few months.

- Who decided the partnership's priorities and who was involved?

The Chairman of the CSP responded that an annual strategic assessment was carried out which identified key areas of risk. The partnership also consulted with local communities and used survey data. There was also the Kent Crime and Victimization Survey which surveyed 4,000 people on a quarterly basis each year.

- What new technologies did the police use to enable police officers to spend more time on the street, rather than behind a desk?

The Chairman of the CSP replied that the use of mobile technology was having an impact on reducing the time spent by police officers in the police station. Various community based locations were currently being identified for officers to report to, rather than using the police station and also officers were expected to be visible and engaging with the public across Medway but particularly in areas with particular problems.

- Is the gap between the public's perception of the impact of tackling anti-social behaviour and crime typical at a national level for the single confidence measure.

The partnership believed there was a lack of public understanding about roles and responsibilities (ie community safety teams, Police Community Support Officers (PCSOs), police and neighbourhood wardens, etc). The CSP was developing an action plan to tackle this. The Chairman of the CSP advised this may take some time to address.

Regeneration, Community and Culture, 16 February 2010

- Members advised that they were aware of reports of recent assaults on students. Given that the four major areas with high crime rates in Medway were also areas where large communities of students lived, could the CSP, with the use of the council's CCTV cameras, provide 'safe highways' home for students, as it must be possible to pro-actively monitor their routes?

The Chairman of the CSP said that he would take the suggestion of 'safe routes' forward for consideration and come back to the Committee on this issue.

- The presentation highlighted the council's and police's involvement in the CSP but what about other partners – was it an equal partnership and did all partners meet the expectations the partnership required?

The Chairman of the CSP advised that the size of the various organisations might differ but the size of the commitment from each partner was significant. Much of the partnership's work was thematic, so different partners were consulted and contributed on each subject matter. It was difficult to quantify this but as Chairman he thought that the commitment from each partner was at a suitable level.

- Paragraph 2.5 of the report gave information on the partnership's Priority 2 – tackling anti-social behaviour, including criminal damage, and described 24 hour targeted operations. What value could be given for an operation that only lasted for 24 hours?

The Chairman of the CSP advised that 10 areas had been identified as locations where levels of anti-social behaviour and criminal damage were highest. The 24 hour operations were heavily resourced initiatives to tackle particular issues but these only worked if long-term strategies were also put in place following the operation. He advised that it was a very useful and successful tactic.

- Were there problems in Medway with regard to disabled people being the target of 'hate' crimes, as seen nationally?

The Chairman of the CSP responded that the CSP was actively addressing the issue of diversity and highlighted the level of reported

Regeneration, Community and Culture, 16 February 2010

crime particularly affecting disabled people and racially motivated incidents. There had been eight reports of 'hate' crime of which 75% had been detected and 110 race-related crimes of which 62-63% had been detected. A range of initiatives were underway. It was acknowledged this was an important area of focus for the partnership.

- How successful had the 'Safety in Action' scheme been? This had involved working with students in schools to reduce levels of litter, graffiti and flytipping.

The feedback from this scheme was that it had generated a positive response from young people.

- The police had initiated specific days for public contact (surgeries) in shopping centres and at specific locations within communities. Did the partnership have feedback on whether contact with the public was more successful when at these locations rather than at the Council's Contact Points?

The Chairman of the CSP promised to report back. His initial response was that wherever police surgeries were held at alternative locations, there was always positive feedback.

- As the Committee now had the power to scrutinise the Community Safety Partnership, could the other partners be present at the scrutiny meeting in the future?

The Chairman advised that this was a matter for the Committee to decide for future meetings.

- Other police forces had use of 'drones' (small helicopters with cameras), would Medway have any of these in the future once their use had been legalised?

Officers advised that 'drones' were already legal and good for crowd control issues but they were not sure that they were readily available for use in Kent.

- If, as had been stated earlier in the meeting, 25% of total crime in Medway took place in Luton and Wayfield, Chatham Central and Gillingham North wards, why was this so high and was there a

Regeneration, Community and Culture, 16 February 2010

strategy to reduce it?

The Chairman of the CSP advised that the three wards where the partnership was focussing its attention across a range of issues were Luton and Wayfield, Chatham Central and Gillingham North. Demographics showed the issues that needed to be addressed in these areas. "Project Superwards" had been devised to do more work in certain locations in these wards, as the partnership had to be business minded and, as discovered, if three wards equated to 25% of the business, it was entirely laudable to focus more work in those locations.

The Committee thanked the Chairman of the Community Safety Partnership and police senior management team for attending the meeting, the presentation and the comprehensive answers to the questions.

Decision:

1. The Committee asked that the following recommendations were taken into consideration by the Community Safety Partnership:
 - (a) that the partnership investigates the provision of 'safe highway' home routes to enable students to walk home without harm, including use of the council's CCTV cameras to monitor this and that the Chairman of the Community Safety Partnership report back to the Committee on the outcome of this recommendation;
 - (b) that other statutory partners of the Community Safety Partnership are invited to attend future meetings of scrutiny of the partnership;
 - (c) that the feedback from the public using police surgeries established in shopping centres and at specific locations within communities should be compared with feedback from people using the council's Contact Points and reported back to the Committee.
2. The Committee agreed to include on the work programme an annual scrutiny review of the Community Safety Partnership in June and annually on that anniversary.

608 ATTENDANCE OF THE PORTFOLIO HOLDER FOR COMMUNITY SERVICES (HOLDING THE EXECUTIVE TO ACCOUNT)

Discussion:

The Portfolio Holder addressed the committee outlining the main achievements within areas of his portfolio:

- grass cutting contract – there had been a dramatic improvement in service
- first phase of the Play Builder programme was being rolled out at a number of sites across Medway. The improvements included provision for the disabled where appropriate
- the Big Lottery Fund schemes had been completed at Riverside Country Park and at Jackson's Recreation Ground
- a partnership had been set up with Hadlow College at Cozenton Nursery. The college was developing its on-site training facilities and the garden festival will take place in May this year
- green flags (external quality accreditation) had been awarded to The Vines, Riverside Country Park and Hillyfields Community Park
- there had been a backlog of enquiries for the tree team to respond to but systems had been streamlined and the backlog was now at more manageable levels
- planning permission for a new tennis academy was soon to be sought at Beechings Cross
- a land-raising scheme was to be developed at Deangate Golf Club to improve the driving range
- the free swimming initiative had seen a 130% increase for under 16's and 150% for people over 60 years of age
- the first event to be held at Medway Park would be the modern pentathlon and tickets were selling well. Other events due to be held this year were the Sports Relief Mile and the Medway Festival of Sport which includes a primary school football world cup

Regeneration, Community and Culture, 16 February 2010

- the Brook Pumping Station would be developed alongside the Chatham town centre regeneration project and Members were welcome to visit this heritage site
- a second HLF funding bid was being prepared for Eastgate House and there had been 14,000 visitors over 70 open days
- there had been a 3% growth in visitors to Rochester Castle
- during the past year, Upnor Castle had seen the highest footfall ever and 40 weddings had been held there
- Medway festivals including the Fuse, Sweeps, summer Dickens and castle concerts had all gone very well and over 35,000 people had also attended the Bonfire Night display.

Members asked about:

- the long term vision for Eastgate House and maintenance of its garden areas
- the progress for financing the modern pentathlon through sponsorship and plans for the future viability of Medway Park
- public transport links to leisure facilities for young people
- refurbishment of Gillingham Park play area
- new allotment facilities
- Rochester Castle concerts
- reduction in income at leisure centres
- carbon footprint/green energy saving devices at Medway Park and other council owned facilities.

The Committee thanked Councillor Doe for his presentation and his responses to Members' questions.

Decision:

The Committee requested information via a Briefing Note about energy saving devices incorporated into and used in the Medway Park development.

609 WORK PROGRAMME

Discussion:

The Committee was advised that the Cabinet had published an updated Forward Plan and the following new items were within this Committee's remit:

- Gateway 1 Options Appraisal: Tree Maintenance Contract, and
- Community Safety Partnership Plan review.

Decision:

The Committee agreed to:

1. note that the LAA performance monitoring report had been deferred until 18 March 2010;
2. note that a report on the result of the consultation process for the Gun Wharf Masterplan, Chatham would be added to the work programme for the June meeting;
3. request that a report on the Community Safety Partnership Plan review is submitted for consideration at the June meeting as pre-decision scrutiny.

Chairman

Date

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