

Crime & Disorder Scrutiny Committee

Tuesday, 14 March 2023

7.30 pm

Present:

Cllr Baljit Hayre (Chair)
Cllr Lyn Milner (Vice-Chair)

Councillors: Derek Ashenden
 Helen Ashenden
 Ejaz Aslam
 John Caller
 Dakota Dibben
 Aaron Elliott
 Brian Francis
 Frank Wardle

Simon Hookway
Kath Donald
Will Lay
James Beautridge
Nikki Escudier
Stuart Wickens
Ben Clarke

Assistant Director (Communities)
Strategic Manager (CSU)
Chief Inspector, Kent Police
Inspector, Kent Police
Area Manager for Dartford and Gravesham, KFRS
Station Manager – Northfleet, KFRS
Committee Services Officer (Minutes)

48. Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were received from Cllr Leslie Pearton, Cllr Tony Rana and Cllr Brian Sangha.

49. Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on Thursday, 27 October 2022 were agreed and signed by the Chair.

50. Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

51. Community Safety Partnership - Response to C&D Topic Reports

The Assistant Director (Communities) explained to Members that following the completion of both the Knife Crime and Serious Youth Violence and Town Centre Crime Topic Reviews, the Committee agreed a series of findings and recommendations to be reported to the Gravesham Community Safety Partnership (CSP) at its next meeting.

The report provided Members with the response of the CSP to the recommendations made and the steps that were already being and would be taken to progress them further information on the recommendations could be found on pages 12 to 14 of the report.

The Assistant Director (Communities) further informed Members that at the previous night's Community & Leisure Committee meeting, a report was considered on the new Serious Violence Duty Policy Statement. Members of this Committee may find that report interesting and were encouraged to read it as it outlined the responsibilities of the Council as a specified authority following the enactment of the Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Act 2022 to work collaboratively to tackle serious violent crime. The Council would work closely with its partners through the Community Safety Partnership (CSP) to manage the Council's obligations under that duty to tackle serious violent crime. The Crime & Disorder Scrutiny Committee will have a role in scrutinising how the CSP addresses this duty.

The Committee were happy with the responses to the recommendations by the Community Safety Partnership and Members that were on the Committee following the election in May were implored to ensure that the actions were correctly implemented.

The Chair added that Members was able to revisit areas previously considered at the Committee and discuss the topic reviews again in the future to consider any further actions required as well as monitor the progress of any outstanding actions.

The Strategic Manager (CSU) advised that a report detailing the work that had been achieved so far could be submitted to the Crime & Disorder Scrutiny Committee in October 2023.

Members noted the response of the CSP to the recommendations made by the Committee's Topic Reviews.

52. Policing update

The Committee were given an oral update on Police work in the Borough by Inspector James Beautridge from Kent Police.

The Inspector, Kent Police further outlined the following key points on various areas of crime:

Violent Crime

- The overall level of violent crime in Gravesham remained low in relation to the other Boroughs in Kent but the media tend to increase the public's safety fears of Gravesend with stories that weren't factually true.
- There was one specific recent example of a serious crime which Members may already be aware of; a serious incident occurred in Parrock Street in which a knife was used, and a vehicle was set alight. Six offenders were arrested within the hour of the incident and four of them are currently in remand in prison awaiting a court date for their trial. In light of that incident, foot patrols with officers in uniform were increased in the area over the following few days to reassure the public and section 60 powers were enacted which allowed officers to search suspicious people in the town for any weapons.

Town Centre Policing

- Car theft rates had risen in the Town Centre related to a spate of specific incidents; the offender's modus operandi was breaking the windows of cars and stealing valuables from within the car. The Town Centre Police Team conducted extensive inquiries with victims, acquired ring doorbell footage, CCTV footage and investigated any stolen bank cards. Following a week of those extensive inquiries, the offender was identified and revealed to be a person travelling from London to Gravesend to commit the crimes; the offender was charged, sentenced and was now in prison
- An armed robbery occurred in Valley Drive; a man entered a shop and robbed the shop while brandishing a knife. The Town Centre Policing Team was deployed and within half hour of the crime, the suspect was located and is now in prison
- The Town Centre Police Team, consisting of two PC's and two PCSOS, had made 58 arrests in the six months which amounted to 114 charges for a range of offences
- Some concern was raised by the public regarding the Town Centre Policing Teams being disbanded under the new Neighbourhood Policing Plan however that was not the case; the new town centre wards would still have a certain number of PC's assigned to each ward, but it would be different officers than assigned currently. It would be a mixture of experienced officers and new recruits

Southern Valley Golf Course

- The site was abandoned, and the Police had received daily reports from residents that off road bikes were causing a nuisance on the site. Reassurance foot patrols had been carried out and since the site had been secured, there had been no more reports of nuisance off road bikes

Prevention/Youth Work

- Officers had given talks to local schools on the dangers of selling and taking drugs, county lines exploitation and criminals using young people's bank accounts to launder money. The feedback received from the schools was positive and the young people were very interactive with officers
- Officers were working with school staff to manage concerns around exploitation of young people by county lines dealers

Rural Policing

- The current rural PCSO had left the force and a new PC officer was due to start in June 2023 but she had already actually started her new role; the PC officer will continue to visit local shops and farms in the rural parts of Gravesham to introduce herself; the PC had been well received by the community so far
- The PC officer was one of thirteen beat officers who had specific wards and would increase the visibility of the Police in the Borough from June onwards

Lawrence Square

- There had been signs of youth exploitation in Lawrence Square by a prolific individual; Kent Police had worked with the Council and youth services to engage with the young people there which, combined with increased visibility of uniformed officers, had reduced anti-social behaviour reports.

Queen Street

- Due to reports of nuisance street drinkers, increased foot patrols were carried out in Queen Street. Kent Police also visited local shops with the Council's Licensing Department to warn them not to sell strong alcohol to the nuisance drinkers

The Chief Inspector, Kent Police concluded that crime, as a whole, was down across the District and criminal charge rates have risen which showed that Policing in Gravesham was headed in the right direction.

In response to questions from Members, the Chief Inspector and Inspector for Kent Police explained that:

- The vehicle set alight during the incident in Parrock Street was one of the offenders' vehicles; the incident was isolated to two conflicting groups and there was no threat to the public. The reason for the groups conflict was currently unknown
- In response to a Members suggestion regarding managing traffic in the area following the incident in Parrock Street, the Inspector advised that the officers did the best they could immediately following the situation but they would take her feedback on board
- Under the new neighbourhood policing model there would be six PCSO's operating in Gravesham; the number had increased as two PCSO's had been inherited from Medway
- There were no PC's currently assigned to wards; following the new policing model there would be 13 PC's assigned to the new wards in Gravesham from June 2023 and they would be a mixture of new recruits and experienced officers. The website for Kent Police will include details on the PC's that had been assigned to each ward
- The new policing model was a historic way of policing by putting unformed officers on the streets; the Chief Constable of Kent Police had reviewed the neighbourhood policing model and felt that having officers 'on the beat', seen by the public and deterring criminals, was the most effective style of policing
- The public would be able to call the PCs on their Kent Police issued mobile phones, but they would not be around 24/7 to take calls; the public were still advised to call 999 if it was an emergency and 101 if action was required but it was not an emergency

The Committee raised concern about the public trust in the Police since the recent arrests of officers that had carried out serious violent crimes on women and queried what Kent Police would do to maintain the public trust in them and how it was ensured that officers were of a professional standard.

The Chief Inspector, Kent Police appreciated the Committee's concern and explained that the recent cases of corruption reported in the media had been in the Metropolitan Police and the Kent Police were a different force with far fewer incidents. Kent Police's vetting of new recruits had been recognised for being of the highest standard and regular checks were continued on officers throughout their time as a Police Officer. Multiple events to reassure the public had been held including 'Violence against Women' walk and talk events in which a number of Walk and Talk events were organised across the county so that officers could engage with as many women as possible and discuss how to reduce risk to them. In addition, the Counter Corruption Strategy and the forces processes were updated regularly to ensure the highest standard; the Chief Inspector concluded that the vast majority of police officers were hard working professional officers.

The Strategic Manager (CSU) further added that Gravesham had the highest rate of reported domestic abuse cases; the figures at 23 February 2023 showed that, compared to the previous 12 months, Gravesham was the only district in Kent that continued to see an increase in the number of reported domestic abuse cases. The continued increase of report rates was a sign of the ongoing confidence of women and girls in Gravesham to come forward and report their abusers to the Police. In response to a Member's question, the Strategic Manager (CSU) was unsure if the charge rate for domestic abusers had also risen in line with the reported cases but would investigate and circulate the information to the Committee.

In response to a Member's question about Members being informed of serious incidents in their wards, the Chief Inspector advised that the most effective communication method was for him to continue to inform the Chief Executive of any serious crime in the Borough and then the Chief Executive would cascade the information to Members.

The Chair thanked the Inspector and the Chief Inspector for their presentation and asked that the Committee's thanks be passed to their Policing Teams.

53. Kent Fire & Rescue Service update

The Committee were given a presentation on the operational activity and prevention work of the Kent Fire & Rescue Service in Gravesham for 2022-23.

The presentation had been published and could be accessed through the below link:

- [Kent Fire & Rescue Service Presentation](#)

Following the presentation, the Kent Fire & Rescue Service Managers answered Members' questions:

- The Kent Fire & Rescue Service educated young people at schools and that included education on fire safety, misuse of flammables, the danger of fires and seasonal activity related to fires such as Halloween and bonfire night etc. The Area Manager for Dartford and Gravesham, KFRS was happy to look into the education schedule and see if schools were approached before Halloween/Fireworks Night to specially discuss the dangers of fireworks in order to deter ASB behaviour. Future education sessions at schools could also utilise Kent Police messaging around the dangerous use of flammable products
- The Building Safety Team were responsible for looking into premises where flammable products were being sold and were able to give advice to shop owners or warnings about the selling of age-related products to underage children. Members were encouraged to report any shops that they were concerned about selling age related products to underage children to the Building Safety Team. The contact information for the team was available through the Kent Fire & Rescue Service website
- The Building Safety Team carried out some work investigating problem premises last year with the Council
- Following the fire at the New Inn on Queen Street, the KFRS would have only been involved in the emergency phase, the building was then handed over to the responsible person during the recovery phase. Due to the building being Listed it

required additional steps to be taken by the property owner which delayed any additional work being undertaken following the KFRS making the building safe. The building remains had to be preserved and experts were brought in to decide the best way forward without further damaging or destroying the building; options such as pushing in the walls and flattening the building were not allowed due to it being Listed. Preserving Listed Buildings was a very complicated process and would have been a reason for the delays in continuing any work to the building after the fire

- The Building Safety Team were aware of all the stacked-up tyres at the Canal Basin, and they had already visited the site and tested all of the hydrants. Staff from the Northfleet Station had revisited the site a week ago and taken further pictures of the stacked tyres and forwarded them to the Building Safety Team again so that they could continue to look into and determine what action could be taken
- Information sharing between organisations was essential in the long term and the Kent Fire & Rescue Service had a great relationship with the Council and the Community Safety Partnership
- The Kent Fire & Rescue Service would not refer to an injured party as a customer, they would be referred to as a casualty or a patient if they were involved in any sort of medical care
- Very few calls made to the Kent Fire & Rescue Service were malicious however there were many calls classed as 'false alarms' which were for things such as burnt cooking which had set an alarm off or a bonfire that was an attended event. The calls were well intended by worried callers, but they did not require any action by the Kent Fire & Rescue Service. Generally, those callers classed as 'false alarms' would receive fire safety advice from a member of staff to make sure it didn't happen again
- There is a number on the website to arrange home safety visits, but the majority of the visits were arranged through the engagement team at local events, meetings, and local interactions with people. Operational crews also gathered information and data on properties with over sixties living in so that the engagement team could visit them and offer them a home safety visit. Houses were knocked on three times at different times and if no one answered following three separate door knocks then a sealed letter was posted to them promoting what the team did and a direct contact number for them to call to arrange a visit

The Station Manager – Northfleet, KFRS apologised for not including information pertaining to the rural areas of Gravesham and agreed to include the statistics and mapping of fires in the rural areas at the next update to the Committee.

Concern was raised by a Member regarding street art on the flank wall of a tattoo shop on the corner of Trafalgar Road, Gravesend that is located opposite a primary school and had a piece of graffiti on the face of the shop depicting a man smoking cannabis. The Chair agreed it was a cause for concern and should be raised with Planning Enforcement who would be able to determine the correct course of action for the graffiti to be removed.

The Chair asked that the Committee's thanks be passed to staff at the Kent Fire & Rescue Service for their hard work.

54. Minutes of the latest published Kent & Medway Police and Crime Panel (and link to Full Agenda to be provided).

The Committee were presented with the minutes of the Kent and Medway Police and Crime Panel meeting held on Tuesday, 06 December 2022.

The Chair advised that the minutes of the most recent meeting held on 01 February 2023 were available on the KCC website. Cllr Mochrie-Cox was the Council representative on the Panel, and he was happy to take questions from Members to the Panel meetings.

The Committee noted the minutes.

55. Exclusion

Resolved pursuant to Section 100A(4) of the Local Government Act 1972 that the public be excluded during the following item of business because it was likely in view of the nature of business to be transacted that, if members of the public were present during this item, there would be disclosure to them of exempt information.

56. Community Safety Partnership - Strategic Assessment

The Committee was reminded that the report was a confidential document, and no information was to be shared with anyone outside the Committee.

The Committee was provided with a Summary of Key Findings of the annual Strategic Assessment prepared on behalf of the Gravesham Community Safety Partnership (CSP). The Assessment primarily considered levels of crime, anti-social behaviour (ASB) and other issues pertinent to community safety for the 12-month period ending 30 September 2022 and drew comparisons with levels recorded in both the years of the pandemic as well as the pre-pandemic year ending 30 September 2019. Gravesham's position was considered against that of other Kent Districts and Medway and where possible, data had been provided by Council Ward to enable a better understanding of issues that may be more prevalent at a local level.

The Strategic Manager (CSU) advised that the data was six months out of date and provided Members with more recent figures.

The Committee held a robust discussion on the figures, the perception of Gravesend Town Centre and the need to promote the good work of the Police and the Council in order to make people feel safer about coming to the Town.

The Chair thanked the Strategic Manager (CSU) for a comprehensive report.

Close of meeting

The meeting ended at 21:00pm.