

Crime & Disorder Scrutiny Committee

Wednesday, 24 October 2024

19.30 pm

Present:

Cllr Baljit Hayre (Chair)
Cllr Jo Hart (Vice-Chair)

Councillors: Derek Ashenden
 Helen Ashenden
 Ejaz Aslam
 Gary Harding
 Gavin Larkins
 Jordan Meade
 Leslie Pearton
 Tony Rana
 Christina Rolles
 Peter Scollard
 Ektaveen Thandi
 Frank Wardle

Mark Lees	Head of Community Protection
Kath Donald	Strategic Manager (CSU)
Kirsty Dunne	Acting Inspector (Kent Police)
Mark Wood	Sergeant (Kent Police)
Jatinder Matharu	Home Office Representative
Suhal Ahmed	Home Office Representative
Ben Clarke	Committee Services Officer (Minutes)

18. Apologies for Absence

An apology for absence was received from Cllr Aaron Elliott; Cllr Jordan Meade substituted.

19. Minutes

The minutes of the meeting of the Crime and Disorder Scrutiny Committee held on Wednesday, 03 April 2024 were agreed and signed by the Chair.

20. Declarations of Interest

Cllr Pearton declared an interest as his daughter worked for the prison service.

Cllr Meade declared an interest as he had a working relationship with Kent Police through his KCC Portfolio as a County Councillor; in addition, he was previously the Chair and trustee of the Street Pastor Charity, but those positions were ceased.

Cllr Rana declared an interest as his daughter-in-law was a Met Police Officer.

21. Home Office Community Engagement Team Update

The Committee were provided with a verbal presentation from Jatinder Matharu and Suhail Ahmed who were representatives of the Home Office National Community Engagement Team. Apologies were given for the local Immigration Team who were unable to attend this meeting.

The two Home Office representatives introduced themselves to the Committee and gave a brief overview of their work:

- The work of the Home Office National Community Engagement Team covered all nationalities and races
- The Home Office had key priority areas such as tackling modern slavery, reducing homelessness, assisting vulnerable communities with accessing key services, offering training to access civil service jobs, supporting young people and the wider local communities
- The team helped to rebuild local communities trust in the Government and its departments; the team wanted to dispel the community fears that Immigration Enforcement was only about arresting and deporting illegal immigrants. Staff members looked at the facts behind each individual case and were keen to work alongside the community to assist rather than arrest
- Many people were fearful of Immigration Services, but the Home Office Team held surgeries in local areas such as community buildings, religious buildings and events where people could discuss issues in a safe place without fear of arrest or intelligence gathering and build trust with the team. Those surgeries were places where residents could access support such as immigration advice, domestic abuse support and signposting to support services etc

The two Home Office Representatives fielded questions from the Committee and explained that:

- The team worked closely with the Strategic Manager (CSU) and the Community Safety Officer and had also worked with several local communities within Gravesend; recently the Home Office had a stall in the Gurdwara in Gravesend during the local Vaisakhi celebrations
- Diversity and inclusion were huge priorities in the Home Office Teams and officers always strived to support those people that required extra help. Community Leaders were worked with to identify those people in the Community who may be disabled and require extra help. Staff were trained in safeguarding and had a duty of care towards the local communities they were helping
- Staff also used the national referral mechanism, where needed, which was a framework for identifying and referring potential victims of modern slavery and ensuring they received the appropriate support
- There were checks and measures in place with the Home Office Team which ensured that everyone was able to access the service at any level. For example, translation services were available to ensure that everyone, no matter where they were from, was able to talk to support services
- Community Leaders were essential in connecting local communities and changing people's perception in order to get them to attend events and seek support. When approaching Community Leaders about holding events or asking for advice on vulnerable parts of the community, they were assured that they weren't there to make

arrests or gather intelligence. The Community Leaders advised the team where they wanted events to be held, and each event was tailored to the community's needs. A lot of positive feedback had been received from various Community Leaders in the past and several had inquired when the Home Office team would come back to their communities to hold events on topics such as modern slavery, domestic abuse and access to services. In some cases, Community Leaders had asked the team to go back on a monthly basis to talk to people from hard to reach parts of the community

- Events have been created in the past which focused on employment and the team ensured that Civil Servants attended the events to offer advice on how to seek employment in the Civil Service, what roles were coming up and what resources they could access to help them gain employment
- The aim of the team was to build trust with local communities and help people with their issues; enforcement was another aspect of the job, and the team had to balance that as part of their work, each case was dealt with individually on its own merits and all people were treated respectfully. The Home Office Team together with immigration officers, recently attended an event for Hindus in Harrow that attracted over 1500 attendees which showed that immigration officers could still work with local communities successfully
- The Home Office Team were bound by the code of conduct and were representing His Majesty's Government (HMG); staff had a duty to promote HMG values and would assist in signposting people to other services that the Home Office may not be able to help with
- The team also worked with the business community, educating them on the rules of employment and the potential fines for employing an illegal worker. The Home Office would work with any charity, housing association or organization that represented a community across the UK
- Work has been undertaken with district Councils in the pasts in West London with regards to dealing with issues with HMOs; the representatives couldn't comment on local issues with HMOs as the local immigration team weren't in attendance

The Strategic Manager (CSU) stated how fortunate the Council were to be working so closely with the Home Office, one of the few Councils in Kent to do so, and praised the work of the Home Office during the Riverside Festival where they held a stall with four officers from the Windrush Team providing advice to local people.

The Strategic Manager (CSU) highlighted several examples where a close working partnership would be beneficial including providing support to those in the community, helping identify rogue landlords that exploited people, disrupting organized crime from preying on vulnerable people and working with businesses to ensure illegal workers weren't employed.

The Strategic Manager (CSU) agreed to share the contact details of the Home Office Team and Members were asked to contact them if they wanted their team to visit one of their communities in Gravesham.

The Chair thanked the two Home Officers Representatives for attending the meeting.

22. Kent Policing Update

Kent Police, Acting Inspector Kirsty Dunne and Sergeant Mike Wood, presented members with a verbal update on recent work being undertaken by Kent Police.

Acting Inspector Kirsty Dunne advised that her presentation would be brief as a lot of the information to be shared was confidential and would need to be reported under Part B.

The following points were highlighted to the Committee:

- A Kent Police operation, called Extinguish, which included involvement of GSAFE was live in the Town Centre. It was focused on tackling retail crime and anti-social behaviour
- Funding had been attained to help prevent violence against women and girls in the Town Centre
- A charity called Charlies Promise had been set up; the charity was set up by a father whose son had been killed with a knife last year. As part of his charity work, he will attend schools and deliver an impactful session on the effects of knife crime. Funding had been secured for the charity and the school sessions will start in November 2024

The Committee noted the information.

23. Topic Review Group Progress Report

The Chair advised that the group had met for one meeting and its membership consisted of Cllr Deborah Croxton, Cllr Helen Ashenden, Cllr Ektaveen Thandi and Cllr Gary Harding. Cllr Croxton had recently been replaced by Cllr Gavin Larkins due to her Cabinet appointment.

The Committee were provided with a presentation, presented by Cllr Thandi, that showed the outcomes of a public consultation on Youth-Related Anti-Social Behaviour.

Copies of the presentation slides and a link to the full report on the responses received to the survey would be provided to Members of the Committee.

The Strategic Manager (CSU) thanked Cllr Thandi for her presentation and added that there was more detail to go with the results of the consultation and the information presented was just a summary of the survey findings, identifying key factors and the impact of youth related ASB to the towncentre and its residents. The Board raised concern that some responses stated that residents avoided town at certain times.

As part of next steps, the Strategic Manager (CSU) advised that surveys had been drafted to send to schools which would give a better understanding of student's issues and possible youth related ASB. The CSP will work with the Child Centre Policing Team to better understand what students were causing a problem and if there were any issues at home which were causing the bad behaviour that could be addressed by support services. Additionally, information would be reported to the Police on students who were beyond helping and required monitoring.

The Strategic Manager (CSU) advised that it was good opportunity to have a roundtable meeting, get the relevant stakeholders together and the community and share all the findings as well look at ways of obtaining funding for activities that could be run.

The Strategic Manager (CSU) advised that the respondents of the consultation were asked to pick three types of youth-related ASB in the town centre out of the list shown in the presentation; noisy/rowdy behaviour, nuisance bikes/scooters and gathering in groups in the streets were the viewed as the biggest problems. Respondents had the chance to write any

other problems, that weren't listed, in the 'other' box for the question. In the full report, all other types of ASB and comments made by the respondents would be outlined for the topic review group to consider

In response to a Members concern that harassment and intimidation were not included on the types of youth-related ASB, Cllr Thandi explained that the group had a discussion on intimidation and there was a finding that there was a generational divide on what was classed as intimidation. Some of the older generational found large groups of young people intimidating when they were not being outwardly intimidating, it was just the size of the group. The Strategic Manager (CSU) further added that 77% of respondents saying that they were avoiding the town centre was indicative of them being intimidated.

The Strategic Manager (CSU) agreed to schedule another meeting of the Topic Review Group in the future.

24. Gravesham CSP Community Safety Strategy 2024-28

The Committee were provided with a report that outlined a new four-year Community Safety Strategy for Gravesham's Community Safety Partnership (CSP).

In its completion, account had been taken of both the findings of the Strategic Assessment 2023 and the responses received from local people to a Community Safety Public Consultation held between mid- October and mid-December 2023. In addition to those findings, certain other considerations were taken into account to help identify those areas of work that now form the priorities contained in this new Community Safety Strategy. Those areas were raised at 1.3 and 1.4 of the report.

The Strategic Manager (CSU) directed members to appendix one and gave a brief overview of the Strategy.

The new priorities for the Gravesham CSP Community Safety Strategy 2024-28 were as follows:

1. Tackling ASB
2. Reducing Violence (including Serious Violence, Domestic Abuse and Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG))
3. Preventing and Reducing Offending
4. Tackling Hate Crime, Guarding Against Extremism and Strengthening Community Cohesion
5. Improving Public Confidence and Trust

The rationale for the selection of each of those priorities was detailed in the Strategy together with information that described what the Partnership's focus would be, what it hoped to achieve, how it would monitor progress and how it would be accountable.

The Committee raised concern that Gravesham had shown an increase in 11.4% in Police recorded ASB incidents this year; the Strategic Manager (CSU) recognised Members

concerns that incidents in Gravesham had risen but she advised that the increase should not necessarily be interpreted as negative. There were a number of reasons for the increase:

- Considerable efforts have been made locally during the year to raise awareness including promoting the ASB review
- Reporting of ASB had been widely encouraged
- The reporting processes and information on the website had been simplified
- Successful action had been taken against offenders such as £20K fines to fly tippers which was well-publicised in the media; the Councils Environmental Enforcement Team was one of the most successful in the County and demonstrated to the public that reporting fly-tipping was worthwhile
- A message of zero tolerance to ASB had been heavily promoted
- The team had a community engagement calendar and events were held locally every week, encouraging people to report ASB and explaining to them what types of ASB should be reported to the Council and what types to the Police

A number of concerns were raised by Cllr Meade who would not support the Strategy in its current form:

- There was a major issue in Gravesend with retail crime, abuse of shop workers and shoplifting but those areas were not mentioned in the report
- There was no mention of the nighttime economy and the impact the crime had on the public perception of the town at night
- The full details of the consultation should have been released with the report or summarised within the report in order for the Committee to properly comment on the proposed Strategy
- There was no mention of GSAFE, and the Gravesham School of Street Pastors in the State and the Council had service Level Agreements with both of those organisations

In response to the concerns raised, the Strategic Manager (CSU) explained that:

- The Strategy was not a Gravesham Council Strategy; it was a Strategy created by the Gravesham Community Safety Partnership. All of the statutory partners of that partnership had viewed/commented on the Strategy and agreed to it including Cllr Mochrie-Cox who was the Chair of Gravesham Community Safety Partnership
- A thorough Strategic Assessment was concluded and following that a public consultation, which was an opportunity for everyone to comment on the proposed Strategy and outline what were most important things to be included, was run from October 2023 to December 2023
- The Strategy covered four years, 2024-29, and would be reviewed on an annual basis as well as discussed during quarterly meetings which would give Members time to comment on any concerns or seek amendments
- During the last performance report that was submitted to the partnership on 17 October 2024; the issue of shoplifting was flagged for discussion and a plan was being formulated with all partners to address retail crime. The Strategic Manager (CSU) agreed to share the performance report with Cllr Meade outside of the meeting

Members noted the Strategy.

25. Minutes of the latest published Kent & Medway Police and Crime Panel

The minutes of the latest meeting of the Kent & Medway Police and Crime Panel held on 16 July were presented to the Committee.

The Chair asked that Members raise any issues they wanted discussed at the next Panel meeting with Cllr Mochrie-Cox.

The minutes were noted.

26. Exclusion

Resolved that 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 the item, there would be disclosure to them of exempt information

27. Policing - Intelligence/Operational Update

Kent Police addressed the Committee and updated Members on confidential operational information pertaining to combating crime in the Borough.

Members had their questions answered by Kent Police.

The Chair thanked Kent Police for sharing their information.

Close of meeting

The meeting ended at 21:20pm.