

Classification: Public

Key Decision: No

Gravesham Borough Council

Report to: Crime and Disorder Scrutiny Committee
Date: 11 October 2018
Reporting officer: Operations Manager, Community Safety Unit
Subject: Safer Place Officers – the First Six Months

Purpose and summary of report:

To inform Members of work being carried out by the Safer Place Officer team introduced into the Community Safety Unit earlier this year.

Recommendations:

1. Members are asked to note and comment on the content of the Report.

1. Background

- 1.1 In recent years, significant improvements have been made in both the physical appearance of Gravesend town centre and the range of facilities and attractions available to both visitors and residents of the Borough. The Council has always worked very closely with Kent Police colleagues and G-Safe, the town's business crime reduction radio scheme, to continue to improve community safety and improve people's perceptions of their personal safety, but it also recognises that low-level incidents of anti-social behaviour (ASB) and particularly environmental damage such as littering, fly-tipping and graffiti can have a negative impact on how the area is viewed. The Council also responded to repeated public complaints of irresponsible cycling in New Road's pedestrianised area by introducing restrictions on when cycling is permitted as part of a Public Space Protection Order (PSPO), the enforcing of which led to consideration being given to the employment of a Safer Place Officer Team.
- 1.2 Three Safer Place Officers were recruited into their posts in February 2018 with their main duty to cover the town centre area and enforce the Public Space Protection Order (Appendix 2). The three female Officers underwent several weeks of training in advance of beginning patrolling and have also continued to receive in-post training on First Aid, Mental Health Awareness, Data Protection, processes for the issuing of Fixed Penalty Notices (FPNs) and Safeguarding.
- 1.3 Their hours of work are Monday-Friday 9.30am-5.30pm and their primary locations for patrolling are the town centre, including the Riverside Area and Heritage Quarter, as well as the key retail shopping area. They will also

occasionally work weekends when large-scale public events are taking place e.g. the Riverside Festival and the Christmas Programme.

1.4 The Officers are a very visible uniformed presence, have body-worn cameras and their responsibilities include:

- 1.4.1 enforcing the PSPO to prevent cycling through New Road at key times when there is heavy footfall to improve personal safety for pedestrians, particularly people with young children and elderly residents/visitors;
- 1.4.2 issuing FPNs to dog owners who allow their dogs to foul and do not clean up after them;
- 1.4.3 sign-posting vulnerable people whom they may come across on the streets e.g. homeless people sleeping rough, to services available to them locally and encouraging them to access help and assistance;
- 1.4.4 advising businesses and retailers of their responsibilities for disposing of trade waste and ensuring that they have proper agreements in place;
- 1.4.5 ensuring that when they encounter graffiti, criminal damage and fly-tipping, that this is reported to appropriate services so that they can be investigated/dealt with as quickly as possible and prevent the problem from escalating;
- 1.4.6 educating and advising people to encourage the responsible disposal of litter and ultimately issuing FPNs if people persistently fail to comply;
- 1.4.7 whilst the Safer Place Officers default patrol area will be the town centre, they are also able to be tasked via the Community Safety Unit to other areas within walking distance of the retail centre when the Unit is receiving reports of ASB e.g. Windmill Hill and Woodlands Park.
- 1.4.8 dealing with unauthorised encampments (tents) on Council land within the geographical area covered by the Team.

1.5 General area map covered by Safer Place Officers

2. First Six Months

2.1 After only a few months, the three Officers have become familiar faces in the town centre and public reaction to their presence has been very positive. The Community Safety Unit has taken telephone calls from residents who have been glad to see Officers in town on a daily basis to tackle issues that can cause a real nuisance/disturbance but who are also approachable and are there to assist and help the public. So far the Officers have:

- 2.1.1 Spoken to and over 150 young persons about cycling in New Road and issued 44 FPNs for cycling in New Road;
- 2.1.2 Two day of Littering Campaign in town centre; 15 FPNs issued for littering;
- 2.1.3 Provided advice to dog owners in parks in regard to dog fouling;

- 2.1.4 Assisted over a dozen homeless people by signposting them to relevant services;
 - 2.1.5 Provided intelligence reports to Kent Police in respect of individuals suspected of committing criminal offences;
 - 2.1.6 Moved on street drinkers whose alcohol consumption has repeatedly resulted in ASB and tried to encourage them to access local alcohol treatment services;
 - 2.1.7 Assisted a number of people who have been taken seriously ill in the town centre and intervened whilst emergency services were awaited;
 - 2.1.8 Trade waste agreements checked on commercial premises in town centre;
 - 2.1.9 Flytipping in town centre reported daily, checked for evidence, and passed to Waste Management for clearance.
 - 2.1.10 Supported legal action through statements and serving of notices on unauthorised tents on council land (4 separate Orders obtained).
- 2.2 Whilst the Officers have enforcement powers their first priority is to provide local people and visitors with a reassuring and friendly presence. They are there to help but also to impose sanctions on and challenge individuals who persistently behave irresponsibly or who fail to comply with a warning once one has been issued to them. They are the positive face of the Council on the street.

3. Case Studies

3.1 Tents

- 3.1.1 Homeless persons have been located in tents on public spaces including Windmill Hill Gardens, Gravesend Promenade and Fleetway Open Space. SPO's attended all areas engaging with individuals to gain information in regard to any safeguarding concerns and signpost to appropriate services to support, such as Porchlight, Sanctuary and Gravesham Council Housing Needs Team. Calls from members of the public report associated nuisance including fires, litter, noise, drinking and drug use and area used as a toilet.
- 3.1.2 Following reports of nuisance SPO's attend and served a Notice to Quit (requiring persons to remove from site in 72hrs). Further engagement is made to ensure referrals are made to appropriate agencies and accommodation is being sought. Any public order offences are reported to Kent Police. Appropriate paperwork is provided to Gravesham Council Legal Team in order to gain possession of land. Orders are sought through the County Court. Once a date is confirmed the relevant paperwork is served with hearing date. Once Order is obtained the Order is served and persons requested to leave. Again referrals are made to appropriate agencies to engage and individuals are supported to find appropriate accommodation.

3.2 Trade Waste

3.2.1 Some commercial waste had been located in areas of the town centre. Safer Place Officers spent time opening bags and checking for evidence to associate with premises. On finding evidence SPOs were able to approach commercial premises and request to view trade waste agreements. Premises are initially reminded of the trade waste agreement and when they are allowed to put out waste. Some new businesses were unaware of the requirements so waste was immediately removed from the street and trade waste arrangements set up via Gravesham Borough Council Waste Management Team or other providers. This approach has seen less commercial waste being put out on the wrong days assisting in improvement in the town centre appearance.

3.3 Working closely with partner agencies

3.3.1 The Safer Place Officers have built good relationships with agencies such as Kent Police, The Grand, Porchlight, Sanctuary, Change Grow Live (CGL) as well as internal departments in the local authority. For example, the SPOs identified a homeless person who was unknown to the local authority. They were initially approached by other agencies whom were unable to gain any information as the person was unwilling to share. The SPOs built a good rapport and were able to identify vulnerabilities with person and confidentially share with partner agencies. This led to the SPOs assisting directly by escorting to support services who were able to assist in accommodating and finding supporting treatment services. The person is no longer street homeless and is being treated through the appropriate services.

4. BACKGROUND PAPERS

4.1 There are no background papers pertaining to this report.

Anyone wishing to inspect background papers should, in the first place, be directed to Committee & Electoral Services who will make the necessary arrangements.

IMPLICATIONS

APPENDIX 1

Legal	The Crime and Disorder Act puts a duty on Council to work with Statutory partners to prevent crime and disorder. The work of the Safer Place Officers contributes to the fulfilling of this duty.
Finance and Value for Money	No implications.
Risk Assessment	Without their work the enforcement of the PSPO would not be taking place.
Equality Impact Assessment	Screening for Equality Impacts
	Question
	a. Does the decision being made or recommended through this paper have potential to cause adverse impact or discriminate against different groups in the community? If yes, please explain answer. N/A
	b. Does the decision being made or recommended through this paper make a positive contribution to promoting equality? If yes, please explain answer. N/A
	<i>In submitting this report, the Chief Officer doing so is confirming that they have given due regard to the equality impacts of the decision being considered, as noted in the table above</i>
Corporate Plan	Strategic Objective 1: Safer Communities
Crime and Disorder	The work of the Safer Place Officers is making a direct contribution to community safety in the town centre, in tackling Anti Social Behaviour and promoting a cleaner environment.
Digital and website implications	No implications.
Safeguarding children and vulnerable adults	The Safer Place Officers have been trained in respect of safeguarding issues.