

Crime & Disorder Scrutiny Committee

Tuesday, 21 January 2020

7:30pm

Present:

Cllr Steve Thompson (Chair)

Cllr Baljit Hayre (Vice-Chair)

Cllrs: Derek Ashenden
 Helen Ashenden
 Ejaz Aslam
 John Caller
 Aaron Elliott
 Brian Francis
 Gary Harding
 Nirmal Khabra
 Emma Morley
 Leslie Pearton
 Lauren Sullivan
 Frank Wardle

Simon Hookway

Assistant Director (Communities)

Kath Donald

Strategic Manager (CSU)

Sean Steer

Operational Manager (CSU)

Neil Loudon

Chief Inspector, Kent Police

Jackie Hyland

Choices (Domestic Abuse Services)

Ben Clarke

Committee & Scrutiny Assistant (Minutes)

72. Apologies

No apologies of absence were received.

73. Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on Thursday, 10 October 2019 were signed by the Chair.

74. Declarations of Interest

No declarations of interest.

75. Step Change Project (Presentation followed by question and answer session)

The Committee received a presentation from Jackie Hyland, a representative of Choices which specialise in Domestic Abuse Services, informing them of the work of the project that supports victims of domestic abuse with complex needs and their children (please see supplementary).

Following the detailed presentation, Jackie Hyland fielded questions and comments from the Committee Members:

- Some victims of domestic abuse do not come forward as they think they will be judged negatively and others do not understand what is being offered or simply do not want to engage in any way
- Choices works in a multi-agency approach, signposting the services at schools and other agencies so that parents with struggling children and victims are more informed of the help that is available to people in their situations
- The refuge accommodation located in Gravesham and Dartford is designed for young women aged 18-25 who have been victims of domestic abuse; the accommodation is also suited to house their children if they have any
- Most often, schools or Early Help will refer domestic abuse victims to Choices as they do not want the help of social services. For a victim to receive help they must give their consent so if they refuse assistance from Early Help then they will refer them to Choices
- Young parents with children that are struggling are also helped by Choices as many children suffer from abusive relationships between their parents; in many examples the local schools have recognised arising issues and have contacted Choice's so that assistance can be offered to the families
- There is no time limit on the help given as the work is carried out in the long term; the only factor that plays into length of assistance given is the amount of funding that Choices receives every year
- Choices local accommodation can provide for a total of seventeen people including children.

The Chair asked Jackie Hyland what she thought the Committee and the Council as a whole could do to improve upon and aid the services offered by Choices.

In response, Jackie Hyland advised that:

- Finding funding was a constant issue as new funding had to be acquired every year; making the project sustainable without the need to monitor funding every year would greatly benefit the service as it could carry out its work without fear of the accommodation centres having to close
- Increased promotion of the services Choices offer through Council channels and further the understanding of the projects that are at work currently in Gravesham

Following a question regarding the funding of the project, the Strategic Manager (CSU) explained that:

- The project receives no funding from KCC; it is solely funded by a grant from the Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government at a cost of circa £68,000 per annum
- That sum covers the cost of a breadth of provision including staff pay, accommodation, phones, travel, DBS checks, training, materials and a slew of other running costs
- The project makes financial sense as the overall cost is vastly cheaper directing people to Choices rather than putting victims into the care of social services; Choices has cared for over 40 families at the cost of £68K whereas the cost of one child going into care is over twice that figure

The Chair thanked Jackie Hyland for the very informative presentation.

76. Town Centre Policing

The Committee received a verbal update from Chief Inspector Neil Loudon informing them on improved level of policing resources that have been introduced in Gravesend Town Centre since September 2019.

The Chief Inspector, Kent Police outlined the following key points to the Committee:

- For the past couple of years, Gravesham has had a dedicated team of two PCSO's who have had to rely on their emergency response colleagues with assistance in policing the Town Centre. However as of 07 October 2019 they have been joined by two PC's who are the Town Centre's new beat officers and they have been performing a fantastic job in Gravesend
- The Town Centre Policing team consisting of the two PC's and two PCSO's are also supported by the Safer Place Officers and the Strategic Manager's (CSU) team of Council Officers. Additionally the two PC's can call on their colleagues from surrounding areas to provide support with matters that require extra assistance
- The two new PC's have been approached daily by members of the public who have been reassured seeing a Police presence in the Town every day; that Police presence has also helped with crime prevention, acting as a deterrent to potential offenders
- They have forged extremely positive relationships with local businesses and have a connection to the GSAFE team as well as working with the probation team and Sanctuary in the Town Centre. Due to their relationships and presence in the Town, they acquire intelligence much more quickly and have been able to make a number of arrests from the information provided
- They start their day (which could be at any time due to different shift patterns) by checking the overnight crime for the Town Centre, check in with the Strategic Managers (CSU) team and then walk around the Town on foot. The general 'beat walk' would entail checking on the High Street, engaging with the public, collating victims statements, reassurance visits and intelligence gathering etc. They have already cleared up a lot of the crime in the Town Centre during the day as they are well attuned to where the habitual offenders are and have utilised intelligence from local business and CCTV to arrest anyone carrying out criminal acts
- They have been working with the British Transport Police and Gravesend Train Station to catch offenders using the trains to get into Gravesend from Medway and London
- With the two PC's tackling the low level crimes in Gravesend, it has allowed other officers to have more time responding to emergency 999 calls which previously might have been delayed due to those lower level crimes
- Due to the success of the patrols in the Town Centre, information has been received from residents and offenders themselves that Gravesend has become a very hard place for criminals.
- General anti-social behaviours such as street drinking, aggressive begging, fake homelessness and shoplifting has decreased in the Town, and the persistent offenders will hopefully receive court orders banning them from the Town Centre for up to five years
- Warrants have been executed, in conjunction with the Council, HMRC and Trading Standards, in premises that have been openly selling illegal tobacco and alcohol. There are a number of premises in Gravesend from which illegal tobacco and cigarettes have been seized on more than one occasion only for stocks to be

replenished in a matter of hours. Multi-agency work continues and actions that would have a longer-term impact are being considered.

- 'Stop and Search' will be utilised by Gravesham Police Officers as long as it is intelligence led; a search will always have due cause, be justified and proportionate.. It has already been used a number of times on offenders and various weapons have been seized including a samurai sword
- Due to the success of the implementation of the two PC's, the figures of reduced crime rates and the arrests will be published in the near future so that the residents of Gravesham can see all the changes that have been made and make them feel safer

The Committee were very impressed by the Chief Inspector's briefing and applauded the work of the officers for their success however the Chief Inspector was questioned whether or not there were similar plans in place to police the night time economy in the Town Centre.

The Chief Inspector, Kent Police agreed that the night time economy was another important aspect and there were plans in place to police it however he advised that he had to balance the shifts that his PCs carried out as it was important to have them working during the day to be seen by the public. There were already a team of officers that covered everywhere in Gravesham from Higham to Vigo but predominantly focused on Gravesend and Dartford Town Centres on Friday and Saturday nights. The Town Centre PCs will assist the night time officers but their main responsibilities will be focused on daytime activity when they can be most effective in apprehending the Town's prolific offenders.

The Committee raised further concern over the amount of trouble that occurs every weekend at the McDonalds branch on New Road and queried if there were any measures that could be taken against it.

The Chief Inspector, Kent Police advised that various venues had had their premises licences revoked before and the Police worked closely with Gravesend's late night premises to ensure everything ran smoothly. The owner of the Gravesend McDonalds franchise has proved helpful in the past and Inspector Craig West works with local premises to create a vibrant but safe night time economy. However, McDonalds does require extra security and measures are being investigated to mitigate the level of crime that occurs there. The Chief Inspector, Kent Police reminded Members that they could not force McDonalds to engage but a joint approach made by the Police and possibly the CSU might be more effective. An update on the situation would be brought to the next Crime & Disorder Scrutiny Committee meeting in March. Although the Chief Inspector, did reinforce the point that McDonalds were a focus for attention nationally as many of them were open 24 hours and provided free Wi-Fi to its customers.

Member's raised several further questions to which the Chief Inspector, Kent Police explained that:

- All officers wear body worn cameras which were very useful when carrying out 'stop and searches' as they reduced complaints and false allegations considerably. Turning the camera on usually made the offender in question less aggressive and if a complaint was made, the footage could be reviewed to see what happened. Many times a complainant has been called in to review the footage and ended up withdrawing their false allegations. On the other hand, the footage has also been used as a learning tool to see where the officers could improve themselves. A stop and search scrutiny panel was created where the public may attend and three or four

random pieces of footage are shown at every meeting where the panel members would scrutinise what went well and what needed to be improved upon

- Kent and Essex Police and local schools are working closely together to resolve recent issues with a lot of school youths coming over on the ferry after school and hanging around McDonalds engaging in anti-social behaviour.
- There are no significant issues of anti-social behaviour at Northfleet Train Station and no intelligence that any criminals will be displaced towards that area. Most of the criminals have moved further afield out of the area.
- Shoplifting does not feature on the Controlled Police Strategy as it isn't seen as significant a crime as domestic abuse, burglary or robbery etc however the Chief Inspector felt that shoplifting was important as it enables other crimes to be funded. As such, targeting shoplifting could help prevent worse crimes occurring in Gravesend in the future
- The new McDonalds installed inside Asda has not had any complaints made against it and there have been no cases of anti-social behaviour; that is likely due to its location outside of the Town Centre and the SIA door staff in addition to the ASDA security

The Strategic Manager (CSU) gave an update to the Committee on the shops that had been selling illegal tobacco in Gravesend:

- Multi-agency work is being developed to try to address the persistent problem of sales of illegal cigarettes and tobacco. Advice has been sought from KCC Trading Standards and HMRC and good practice approaches used in other areas are being considered with a view to replicating them locally. One of the benefits of having the two Town Centres PC's is that the seizures can be ramped up and carried out much more often as previously there would be long delays between raids due to the level of resources available. The sharing of intelligence between Police colleagues and Council officers who have roles that bring them into contact with businesses and the public is helping to build evidence that will hopefully support formal legal action. It was also important to note that enforcement action should also, if possible, be supported by an awareness-raising campaign about the potential health risks associated with these products which often contained a range of substances that were completely unregulated. Hopefully, a positive update will be presented to the Committee at the next meeting on 17 March.

The Chair advised the Chief Inspector, Kent Police that the CSU and the Communications Team at GBC may be able to help with the publicising of the positive results from the deployment of the two new PC's in Gravesend.

The Chair thanked the Chief Inspector, Kent Police for his informative briefing.

77. Terms of Reference – Topic Review Groups

Members were invited to consider the terms of reference for the two topic reviews selected by the Committee: Knife and Violent Youth Crime and Town Centre Crime.

The Chair informed the Committee that the two Chairs of each Topic Review Group had decided that the Town Centre Crime review group would be deferred until May 2020 following the decision made last week at Overview Scrutiny to defer one of their reviews to

May 2020. The reasons for the deferrals were due to officer resources being stretched too thin and asking too much of GBC partners in such a short amount of time.

The Assistant Director (Communities) advised that the Terms of Reference were stated in the report as well as the nominations to each Topic Review Group. The next stage will be agreeing dates for the review group meetings and discussing a workplan as well contacting all of the necessary partners to take part in the meetings.

The Committee agreed:

1. The Terms of Reference for both Topic Review Groups
2. The composition of the Topic Review Sub-Groups listed in the report
3. The Knife and Violent Youth Crime Topic Review Sub-Group will move forward and a date for its first meeting will be chosen following the conclusion of the meeting

That a start with the Town Centre Crime Topic Review Sub-Group be deferred until May 2020.

78. Kent & Medway Police and Crime Panel Full Agenda (21 November 2019 – latest published)

The Committee was presented with the agenda and minutes for the Kent and Medway Police and Crime Panel meeting held on Tuesday, 24 September 2019.

It was queried by a Member if Gravesham were likely to be a part of the mini cadet scheme.

The Chief Inspector, Kent Police advised that the scheme was currently sitting with the Superintendent who was reviewing the logistics of the scheme. However, the Committee were advised that if the scheme was progressed then a pilot would be tested in Gravesham and Dartford.

The Committee noted the information contained within the report.

Close of meeting

The meeting ended at 8:50pm.