

Crime & Disorder Scrutiny Committee

Thursday, 20 January 2022

7.30 pm

Present:

Cllr Baljit Hayre (Chair)
Cllr Peter Scollard (Vice-Chair)

Councillors: Derek Ashenden
 Helen Ashenden
 Ejaz Aslam
 John Caller
 Dakota Dibben
 Aaron Elliott
 Brian Francis
 Gary Harding
 Lyn Milner
 Tony Rana
 Frank Wardle

Please note: Cllr Shane Mochrie-Cox was in attendance.

Simon Hookway	Assistant Director (Communities)
Kath Donald	Strategic Manager
Sean Steer	Community Safety Operations Manager
Junior Dann	Chief Inspector, Kent Police
James Beautridge	Inspector, Kent Police
Rachel Westlake	KCC Commissioning Team
Ben Clarke	Committee Services Officer (Minutes)

23. Apologies for Absence

An apology for absence was received from Cllr Elizabeth Mulheran; Cllr Lyn Milner acted as her substitute.

An apology for absence was also received from Cllr Leslie Pearton.

24. Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on Thursday, 20 January 2022 were agreed and signed by the Chair.

25. Declarations of Interest

No declarations of interest.

26. Domestic Abuse - Kent & Medway Commissioned Services

Rachel Westlake, a member of the KCC Commissioning Team provided the Committee with an informative presentation on how Kent & Medway Commissioned Services were tackling the issue of domestic abuse, the figures of domestic abuse for Gravesham and the Services in place to help the victims

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

- [\(Public Pack\) Presentation - Domestic Abuse - Kent & Medway Commissioned Services Agenda Supplement for Crime & Disorder Scrutiny Committee, 20/01/2022 19:30](#)

Following the presentation, Members had their questions answered:

- The team were seeking to strengthen the voice of survivors of domestic abuse including the voices of survivors who may not have access to the support services available or weren't aware of them. Those people abused that had disabilities were especially vulnerable and often were not capable of seeking support; in many cases the team would work with social care teams as they were best placed to report cases of abuse of disabled people in their care as well as being able to refer their patients to the relevant support services
- Within the presentation, there was a link to the Access Needs Assessment; that Assessment gave a full breakdown of the domestic abuse data including the types of domestic abuse reported and the percentage of domestic abuse cases reported in each ethnic group
- There was further information on domestic abuse in Asian groups in the Access needs Assessment; in addition, the team were also looking to run a professional campaign and work with local community figures/professionals to raise awareness of domestic abuse in different groups. Rachel Westlake thanked Cllr Rana, Cllr Hayre and Cllr Aslam for their offer of assistance with contacting Gravesham Asian groups
- Prior to Covid, successful events were organised by the Council and covered a range of issues such as forced marriage and modern slavery. The event was usually held in conjunction with Kent Police and support services and was usually attended by around 350 women and girls from all ages in the local Asian population. A similar event was planned to be held in March 2022 and translators and interpreters would be in attendance to make the event more accessible and allow for potential victims who couldn't speak English to be engaged with. Kent Police and the KCC Commissioning Team would also be part of the event
- There was a link between poverty/lower income bracket and higher amounts of reported domestic abuse however domestic abuse affected all types of people and often more affluent areas had hidden victims of abuse
- Current figures for domestic abuse victims coming forward was not available but Rachel Westlake agreed to contact PCSO's in order to get further details
- The Strategic Manager attended the Gravesham Community Safety Partnership (CSP) meeting this morning; the partners were notified of the domestic abuse work undertaken over the last twelve months. It was noted that the Council had worked more closely with male victims that were reluctant to come forward and had tried to break the cycle
- Two-year funding for the Hospital IDVA Project was first received in 2018 however the project was so successful it had been funded ever since; when a victim of abuse was in hospital it made them feel safer and was a perfect opportunity for a staff member or support service representative to approach a potential victim as they usually felt secure in disclosing information when they were in a health setting. Hospitals were also creative in reaching out to potential victims; the IDVA team worked with hospitals to talk to potential victims on their own and not raise the potential perpetrators awareness. The

IDVA Team were also adept at identifying 'frequent flyers'; patients that had been in the hospital a significant number of times with injuries that related to domestic abuse. The project has been very successful and even some NHS staff came forward as they were suffering domestic abuse

The Chair thanked Rachel Westlake for an informative presentation.

27. Tackling Domestic Abuse - Current Position and Progress

The Committee were provided with an up-to-date picture of recorded domestic abuse occurring in the Borough together with the likely impact of the Covid-19 pandemic. The report also considered how Gravesham's experience compared to that seen in other parts of Kent and joint work being carried out by the Community Safety Partnership (CSP) to support victims and their families.

The Strategic Manager went through the report in detail and outlined key points for Members to note.

The Strategic Manager and Rachel Westlake fielded questions from the Committee and explained that:

- The KCC officer who led on media had been in touch with Southeastern and they agreed to display the service posters for domestic abuse on Southeastern property all over the County. This builds upon the securing of space by GBC officer Dorota Trapl at Gravesend Railway Station during the 16 Days of Action in 2021.
- The next iteration of KCCs communication plan was being drawn up and Rachel Westlake agreed to raise Cllr Milner's suggestion of putting up domestic abuse posters on Gravesham's new Bus Hub and bus stops around the Borough
- It was known by the Council and KCC that summertime and football events in conjunction with alcohol consumption were key times when domestic abuse was at a higher level; some events were planned around important events such as the World Cup and work would be undertaken to support victims during the summer months
- The Council had not created any literature for parents advising them what not to do in front of their children i.e., no swearing or abusive behaviour; the Strategic Manager liked the idea though and advised that it could be looked into as part of the preventative work for people that were at risk of committing domestic abuse or who had already committed domestic abuse. The leaflets would challenge behaviour that could be detrimental to children and influence behaviour in later life
- The team still needed to conduct an assessment of the successfulness of the 16 Days of Action project, what impact it had, how many people sought support for domestic abuse and several other questions. During and following the project there were no inquiries from members of staff suffering from domestic abuse but different colleagues had remarked on the effectiveness of the material circulated
- Rachel Westlake advised that her quarter three reports would include information on who came forward to seek support following the 16 Days of Action project; once the information was analysed it could be fed back to Committee Members

Observations by a Member were noted by the Committee:

- Figures for domestic abuse were higher in the winter than the summer which was surprising

- Gravesham held the lowest figures for the number of visits to the one stop shops in 2018/19 but other than that attendance has been very good and stable whereas there been a decrease in visits to one stop shops in neighbouring districts.

The Chair thanked the Strategic Manager for a comprehensive report.

28. Knife & Youth Crime Topic Review Update

The Committee were provided with the findings of the Knife and Serious Youth Topic Review and recommendations for future Gravesham Community Safety Partnership (CSP) activity in its multi-agency approach to addressing this issue.

The Assistant Director (Communities) introduced the report and highlighted a typo in the group membership in the report; it should read Cllr Elizabeth Mulheran not Ashenden in the group membership. The Assistant Director (Communities) agreed to amend the typo.

Cllr Rana, as Chair of the Review Group, guided members through the report and explained the reasons for the recommendations made by the Review Group:

1. Ensure that statistics and supporting contextual information is available to gain a clear understanding of the level and nature of knife and youth crime.
2. Review and agree the best means to communicate crime issues with the local community, to keep them informed as to the reality of violent crime locally, perhaps triggered by specific incidents, to build confidence and help to counter a disproportionate fear of crime;
3. Understand the beneficial role of Neighbourhood Watch and explore opportunities to support the expansion of Neighbourhood Watch within Gravesham.

Cllr Rana added that he was disappointed that a PCSO attended the PACT meetings as he felt that a working Police Officer would have given better weight to the meeting and been able to provide answers to questions asked by attendees.

Cllr Rana asked that another sub-group meeting be scheduled for the future and attended by the group members, Police officers and youth leaders in the community. The aim of the meeting would be for the Police and youth leaders to report to the group what was happening with knife crime, what was the cause of knife crime and what active measures the Council could take to prevent further knife crime. Those areas needed to be discussed before the way forward was discussed.

The Assistant Director (Communities) advised that a further meeting would be scheduled with a multi-agency approach; the outcome of that meeting will be reported to the Crime & Disorder Scrutiny Committee and once recommendations were agreed they could be fed back to the CSP.

The Assistant Director (Communities) further added that the Town Centre Review sub-group would also be underway soon and a report would now have to be brought on the findings of that group to the October meeting of Crime & Disorder Scrutiny Committee.

In response to a Member's concern, the Assistant Director (Communities) advised that the Strategic Manager had been looking at knife crime reports in local media and creating a comparison of incidents.

The Chair advised that he was happy with the proposed dates for the review.

29. Kent Police Update

The Committee were given an oral update by Inspector James Beautridge from Kent Police.

Knife Crime

- Knife crime was not a serious problem in Gravesend; there had been a few isolated incidents, but they weren't any random attacks, and it should not be a serious concern for residents. In July/August last year there were three or four isolated incidents within a week of each other which caused the concern, reported by local media, but they weren't linked and following that week there weren't any knife crime incidents
- The issue was looked at with Chief Inspector Dann and CROKUS was instigated in the Pelham and Central wards. Police were highly visible in those wards providing reassurance to the local residents
- Section 60 search powers were enacted on weekends in the relevant wards which deterred people from carrying weapons and the feedback from social media was that local residents were happy and felt safer seeing Police officers walking around Town. The search powers were reviewed and found to be proportionate; the effect was immediate, and the search powers were scaled back over summer 2021 as there were no further incidents. Night-time patrols were still carried out
- Police conducted licence checks with violence against women at the forefront of checks and work was carried out around drinks spiking
- Knife arches that detected metal and needles were taken into Town and given to door staff; door staff could refuse entry to people who did not walk through the arches or submit to a search prior to entering a premises. Knife wands that detected metal and needles were also handed to door staff
- Police spoke to door staff about drink spiking concerns and general violence in the Town Centre which was well responded too. The night-time patrols made use of extras funding and there were more resources deployed to the Town Centre on Friday and Saturday nights. Officers looked for possible troublemakers early on in the weekend to mitigate the chances of them causing more trouble in the evening and early hours
- Weapon offences were down by 29.5%; the drop showed that the forces tactics were working effectively
- Youth Engagement Officers and the Violence Unit had been attending local schools to give talks and deter gang culture. The Police had been working with Charlton Football Club to bring sports to deprived areas
- A Sergeant on North Kent Police was a qualified boxing coach, and he was planning on creating a boxing club for local youths run by the Police
- Gravesend was not a dangerous Town and more information needed to be pushed out on all social media platforms to show the work the Police had been doing and that Gravesend was safe Town to visit

Town Team

- The Town team consisted of three PC's and one PCSO; from January to September 2021, they arrested a significant number of offenders with the majority being charged and sentenced. The team targeted offenders that had been released from prison,

visiting their address and welcoming them back to the Borough as they were generally the people who reoffended immediately after release and were sent back to prison

- The illegal tobacco trade was being handled, known shops were visited regularly and advice was being sought from Legal Services on next steps.
- There had only been one PACT meeting since Covid and the reason only a PCSO attended was due to there being no Police officers available. Attendees were asked to send any questions they may have to Inspector Beautridge prior to the meeting so they could be given to the PCSO to read out, however none were received. PCSOs did have a better knowledge of local areas and were able to answer most questions about residents wards
- Two weeks ago, there was a street engagement project conducted in Wallis Park; Council and Police officers knocked on doors and asked people what the local problems were. A piece of knowledge was gleaned which led to the arrest of a nuisance motorcyclist and his vehicle was confiscated
- The next street engagement project was due to be held in Denton and Dalefield; the intention was to roll the project out to all wards in Gravesham
- Local Councillors will be invited to all street engagement projects from now on

E-Scooters

- Police officers visited retailers and made them aware of the illegality of E-Scooters and posters were put up to educate people. Various people used e-scooters, not just drug dealers so there was a varied approach taken. However, drug dealers e-scooters were actively targeted and crushed wherever possible

In response to a Member's question, the Assistant Director (Communities) advised that information on the illegality of e-scooters was put in the Your Borough magazine, but the team could clarify the responsibilities of the Council for e-scooters and put a message out in the Members bulletin.

The Chair asked that the Police works to combat knife crime also be included in the Your Borough magazine.

Burglaries

- There had been a significant reduction in burglaries, dwelling burglaries had reduced 40%, and although a lot of that reduction was due to Covid-19, Police officers visited vulnerable areas and distributed shed alarms. The force also worked closely with probation so any known burglars returning to the Borough were visited and monitored to prevent further burglaries from occurring

Inspector James Beautridge fielded questions from Members and explained that:

- The Nitrous oxide/laughing gas cannisters were a problem nationwide; users of the cannisters often used them in secluded car parks and other areas similar with cannabis use. It is illegal to use but it's a lower class of drug. The Police were aware of the issue and encouraged people to report it. The Community Safety Operations Manager added that there used to be a public space protection order against using them, but it was difficult to catch people in the act

- The recent road check in Harmer Street was to check vehicles going towards the main route into the Town Centre for weapons and drugs related to county lines gangs; the road checks were also carried out in other areas such as Dartford. The checks were run by local policing teams and moved around frequently
- There had been several cases of car theft in Riverview and Whitehill, but comments couldn't be made on live cases; residents were encouraged to call 999 if a car theft was in the process or 111 if the car had been stolen a while ago. The figures for theft of motor vehicles were actually down by 16.3%; the cars that had been stolen were stolen with reprogramming kits which allowed certain cars to be unlocked and driven away such as Ford Fiesta ST's. The Serious Crime team were looking into the professional gangs that were stealing motor vehicles. Inspector James Beautridge reminded everyone to report cases of stolen motor vehicles to the Police as the Police couldn't provide assistance if they weren't aware of any crime

Members raised concern over fireworks misuse and shops selling fireworks to underage teenagers; the Committee advised that it would be beneficial to have increased information circulated to raise awareness of fireworks misuse and tell shop owners of their responsibilities.

In response to a Member's query over Gravesham offering employment schemes for repeat offenders and parolees, the Assistant Director (Communities) explained that the team could look into the options available, possibly a promotion with the employers who offered offender employment.

Cllr Derek Ashenden complained of 'keyboard warriors' on social media that made Gravesham sound like a dangerous town when the actual crime figures showed Gravesend to be a safe Town. He asked that a PACT meeting be held, or a leaflet distributed which revealed the true crime figures in Gravesend, the sterling work completed by Kent Police and showed residents that Gravesend was not dangerous.

In response to the Chairs question if data was available on crimes committed in each ward the Strategic Manager explained that ward level data hadn't been received for some time but was now being provided so could be included in CSP quarterly performance reports. A communications framework document had been created and partner agencies were being worked with to communicate messages to the public. The intention was to be able to provide information to smaller areas and neighbourhoods through things such as My Community Voice and a CSP website so that the public and Members could see what was happening in their areas. The next CSP meeting was in April 2022 and a report would be taken laying out the communication framework, what means would be used and how information would be used; the feedback from that meeting would be brought back to the Committee.

Inspector James Beautridge explained that My Community Voice was a live website which asked users to create an account completely free and allowed them to view crime statistics in their area as well as send messages to local officers. The Police could use the website to send out alerts to users such as a certain crime type affecting a street; users were able to search whatever area they wanted to learn more about and could choose how they received alerts. Inspector James Beautridge informed Members that he would send over their ward data to each of them so that they could use it to canvas their wards for sign up to the website. A leaflet with the QR code would be scanned and emailed over to Committee Members for dissemination to the community.

Following further Member concern that a Police officer did not attend the previous PACT meeting; Chief Inspector Junior Dann assured the Committee that they would review their staff schedule to have an officer attend the next meeting; if a Police officer could not attend then Chief Inspector Junior Dann would attend.

In response to a Member query on the process of requesting the installation of a CCTV camera at Echo Square roundabout, the Strategic Manager explained that a permanent camera was expensive to install and maintain in the long term, so a lot of evidence needed to be provided as to the need for the camera which must always also be justified and proportionate in line with CCTV regulations. The request for CCTV usually came from sufficient information received from the Police advising why a CCTV camera was necessary and how the crime figures justified the need. The Strategic Manager advised that she did not think getting a mobile/temporary camera installed at Echo Square would necessarily be an issue if the criteria were met, but privacy concerns and crime displacement would have to be taken into consideration as well. The Strategic Manager suggested first requesting a temporary rapid deployment CCTV camera would also test the need for a permanent CCTV camera.

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

The Committee were presented with the minutes of the Kent and Medway Police and Crime Panel meeting held on 17 June 2021.

The Committee noted the minutes.

Close of meeting

The meeting ended at 21:28pm.