

Crime & Disorder Scrutiny Committee

Tuesday, 15 March 2022

7.30 pm

Present:

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

Councillors: Derek Ashenden
 Helen Ashenden
 Harold Craske
 Dakota Dibben
 Brian Francis
 Gary Harding
 Bob Lane
 Jordan Meade
 Elizabeth Mulheran
 Tony Rana
 Frank Wardle

Simon Hookway
Kath Donald
Sean Steer
Junior Dann
James Beautridge
Julie Francis-Beard

Assistant Director (Communities)
Community Safety, Strategic Manager
Community Safety, Operations Manager
Chief Inspector, Kent Police
Inspector, Kent Police
Committee Services Officer (Minutes)

31. Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were received from Cllrs Ejaz Aslam, Cllr John Caller, Cllr Aaron Elliott and Cllr Leslie Pearton. Cllrs Jordan Meade, Cllr Bob Lane and Cllr Harold Craske substituted.

32. Minutes

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

33. Declarations of Interest

No declarations of interest were made.

34. Kent Police Update

The Committee received a verbal update from Inspector James Beautridge.

In the Town Centre there are currently 3 PC's and the following figures are from October 2021 – March 2022: -

- There have been 54 arrests, of which 37 of those were charged, 16 released on bail and 1 arrested person was released with no charge.
- 46 stop and searches were conducted with one community prevention order issued and two tickets for breaches of Public Spaces Protection Orders (PSPO).
- Caught on Camera, which are stills from shops and CCTV have identified 23 suspects.
- There is extensive work being carried out regarding the sale of illegal tobacco in partnership with Gravesham.
- The Police and Crime Commissioner visited and patrolled the town recently and described the Town Team as the epitome of what they want for Kent Police Town Teams and they are now role models. Chief Inspector, Junior Dann of Kent Police is very proud of the team.
- There have been a series of robberies in the Promenade area of the town. The Town Team did extensive work and engaged with the community and has led to 3 suspects being arrested, they have since been released on bail.
- The Town Team have been nominated for a Chief Constable's Award.
- In the town, in partnership with the council, a "Best Bar None Scheme" is being launched. Initially this will be open to all pubs, bars and club premises in the Borough as a whole and to all restaurants in Gravesend town centre that are licensed to sell alcohol. Restaurants will be included as well. There will be six assessors trained and they will go and inspect all the pubs and restaurants that have signed up. A launch event will happen in June. Representatives from the council and Kent Police will be inspectors and there will be an annual award ceremony with awards in safety and CCTV amongst others. This scheme has been trialled successfully over the last year in other parts of the country.
- General Policing – street engagement took place in Wallis Park and Denton. Kent Police advertised this prior to attending and it was well represented by KCC, Environmental Health, Council Officers, Housing, Councillors from the Denton Ward and Kent Police attending, and it was well received. Kent Police were knocking on doors giving out My Community Voice leaflets, dog fouling bags and speaking to people and asking what issues they had.
- Following on from the feedback they received in the Denton area increased foot patrols have been undertaken by PCSO's and the Community Policing Team conducted road checks ensuring residents feel safer. The joint operation has been really well received by the community. This approach will be rolled out to the whole borough in time.
- Night time economy – the Police are continuing to run the "Safer Streets" scheme primarily aimed at alcohol related crime and making the area safer especially for women. Engagement with the Licensing Team and educating door staff for signs to look out for and distributing knife arches / wands and training door staff on how to use them.
- A fall in public order offences could be due to the high visibility of the Police.
- In May, the Police will be running SEPTA – anti knife crime which is a national initiative. Kent Police will jointly be conducting work with the Transport Police, Gangs and County Lines Teams involving high visibility and targeting offenders.
- Drug possession had gone up by 13.4% which showed the stop and searches are working.

The Chair thanked Inspector James Beautridge for the informative update.

35. Knife Crime and Serious Youth Violence Topic Review

Cllr Rana updated the Committee with the work being done on the Knife Crime and Serious Youth Violence Topic Review.

There have been two workshops where a number of different parties were invited to. It was well attended and the feedback and questions were very positive. One of the main points that was mentioned was that although a lot of work was being done in the background this was not communicated to residents either via social media or through websites.

What was found was that perception of crime plays a big part in people feeling safe. Reporting needs to be encouraged and the police need to communicate positive actions. PACT meetings are a great way of the police communicating with communities and a good way of putting their worries and issues across and the Police being able to know what areas they should be focusing on.

Attendance is crucial that the police attend any incidents. Early reporting of crimes allows the PCSOs to stop any further crime. At Kings Farm and Whitehill the PCOs, who patrolled the area, are quick to respond to local issues e.g. car crime or unruly behaviour by teenagers and actually stopped further crime happening.

PCOs that are out patrolling in those areas have regular contact with the local councillors, which is good.

Another area that was reviewed was the statistics of crime. The improvement statistics that Kent Police have made on knife crime was hardly known or there was very little information available to the public. People need to know where to go to view these statistics and also be able to report a crime online. Publishing the statistics has shown that Gravesham is one of the quietest towns in Kent regarding knife crime.

The second part of the review was regarding young people. How do the different organisations in Kent engage with them to stop knife crime becoming a real issue. What was found was that there was no central place where activities were being advertised to inform children and young people where to go and participate in the clubs / activities. Not many people knew that Charlton Football Club were hosting a "kick about" at Kings Farm. The Violence Reduction Unit mentioned this event which had a real positive effect as it took a number of children off the streets to play a game of football. This should be advertised as positive news.

What was also found was that the Northfleet Youth Hub, The Grand, and youth clubs were hosting events that were being run successfully but were not being advertised anywhere so parents and guardians were unaware they could take children to these events. Communication has to get better along with engagement with young people to inform them of where to go for events in their local area. Whilst there is an issue, there is a lot of good work happening to reduce knife crime further.

From May 2022, further funding from the Government will be available to run youth programmes in Kent for the next two years. Any youth activity can apply and, if viable, funding will be provided.

The Assistant Director (Communities) explained that additional background papers had been received, including statistics. These will be circulated to the Topic Review Group.

The previous Committee received a summary report and recommendations to date and from that an additional meeting was identified to look at knife crime issues in young people. The Assistant Director (Communities) explained that as the next Crime and Disorder Scrutiny Committee was not until October a draft report would be completed with the Topic Review Group. This could be reported to the Community Safety Partnership as an interim stage. This would be timely as the CSP also has a new duty in respect of serious violence and a strategic assessment will be reported to the CSP shortly. A final Topic Review report could then be discussed and agreed at the next Crime and Disorder Scrutiny Committee.

The Chair thanked Cllr Rana and the Assistant Director (Communities) for the information given.

36. Town Centre Topic Review

The Committee received a verbal update from the Assistant Director (Communities) regarding the Town Centre Topic Review.

Members of the Topic Review group met last week to look at the scope and next steps for this review. As the Town Centre Crime review is quite broad, Members agreed the first meeting would be to confirm that daytime responses to crime and understand the actions taking place. The review would then move to discuss the night time economy and the crimes association with that. Additional partners would be asked to speak to Members e.g. Kent Police, G-Safe, Street Pastors and representatives from licensed premises to establish the facts around the current position.

A subsequent meeting would be held to discuss how to make the town safer especially for women and girls. Plenty of ideas have been forthcoming and one of those approaches was to look at sending a questionnaire to businesses, residents and visitors to get their ideas around what steps can be taken to help people feel safe.

Those meetings will take place with a report coming back to this Committee in October.

Following questions and comments from Members, the following was discussed:

- The Chair asked if a further night time 'audit' could be arranged during the summer months. The Assistant Director (Communities) explained that in November 2019, Members went out with Council Officers and Kent Police to see how the town performed and changed from early evening to the early hours of the morning. There was always a plan to organise another event during the summer months, but Covid-19 hit. Consideration will be given to undertaking a similar exercise, to which Members would be welcome.
- Cllr Wardle mentioned that another part of the Town Centre Topic Review remit was to understand and investigate large gatherings of youths especially between 5pm - 8pm around McDonalds and what engagement could happen.

37. Minutes of the Kent and Medway Police and Crime Panel

The Committee were presented with the minutes of the Kent and Medway Police and Crime Panel held on Wednesday, 8 December 2021.

The Committee noted the minutes.

38. Exclusion

Resolved pursuant to Section 100A(4) of the Local Government Act 1972 that the public be excluded from any items included in Part B of the agenda because it is likely in view of the nature of business to be transacted that if members of the public are present during this items, there would be disclosure to them of exempt information.

39. Strategic Assessment 2021 – Summary of Key Findings

The Community Safety, Strategic Manager informed the Committee of the key points raised in the Gravesham Annual Strategic Assessment 2021 – A Summary of Crime and Anti-Social Behaviour prepared on behalf of the Gravesham Community Safety Partnership (CSP).

The production of the Strategic Assessment is an annual exercise carried out by all CSPs with the primary purpose of reviewing levels of crime, disorder and anti-social behaviour (ASB) in their area and providing an opportunity to revise existing strategic priorities to reflect changing circumstances.

The report highlighted changes in levels of crime and anti-social behaviour and the Borough's position against that of other Kent Districts and Medway. It concluded with recommendations that have been adopted by the CSP and that will form part of its prioritised work programme over the next 12 months.

Following questions and comments from Members, the Community Safety, Strategic Manager explained that:

- Although crime has risen in some areas, overall crime has fallen (some decrease being directly linked to the pandemic). ASB reports have risen but in part this is due to a large proportion of ASB incidents being specifically linked to breaches of Covid-19 social distancing regulations that have been included in ASB data. It could also be due to more people reporting crimes; considerable work has been undertaken locally to encourage reporting and outcomes of investigations have been well-publicised which in turn promotes public confidence that reporting is worthwhile.
- Regarding the Anti-Social Behaviour Awareness Week which will be between 18 – 24 July, a series of pop-up events in different locations will be programmed. Members will be informed of these activities and relevant dates so they can promote and engage the communities in these multi-discipline activities. Housing Officers, KCC street lighting, Kent Police, voluntary and community sectors will be involved in the relevant events.
- Parking on pavements remains an issue. The Government are bringing in law to stop parking on certain roads. The Assistant Director (Communities) agreed to discuss with the Parking & Environmental Enforcement Services Manager what actions can be taken locally to address this issue.
- E-Scooters are classed as motor vehicles as they require an MOT and insurance. Any E-Scooter being driven on the road is illegal. E-bikes are legal as they are partially pedalled.
- Inspector Beautridge confirmed that there had been few instances of catalytic converters being stolen from hybrid cars locally.
- Crime prevention advice on how to protect hybrid vehicles and catalytic converter theft is largely available on the Internet but can include simple steps such as: parking

close to walls/fences to prevent easy access to under the vehicle; Marking catalytic converters with a serial number; asking a garage to weld the bolts on the converter shut to make it difficult to remove; parking in well-lit areas; attaching a clamp to exhaust pipes, making it very difficult to remove the converter in a hurry.

Resolved that the Committee considered and offered comments upon the content of the report as appropriate.

Close of meeting

The meeting ended at 8.50 pm