

Crime & Disorder Scrutiny Committee

Thursday, 27 October 2022

7.30 pm

Present:

Cllr Baljit Hayre (Chair)

Councillors: Derek Ashenden
 Helen Ashenden
 Ejaz Aslam
 Gurjit Bains
 John Caller
 Dakota Dibben
 Aaron Elliott
 Brian Francis
 Lyn Milner
 Leslie Pearton
 Tony Pritchard
 Tony Rana
 Steve Thompson

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

Simon Hookway	Assistant Director (Communities)
Kath Donald	Strategic Manager (CSU)
Will Lay	Chief Inspector, Kent Police
James Beautridge	Inspector, Kent Police
Ben Clarke	Committee Services Officer (Minutes)

40. Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were received from Cllr Jordan Meade, Cllr Frank Wardle and Cllr Sangha (Vice-Chair); Cllr Tony Pritchard, Cllr Gurjit Bains and Cllr Thompson acted as their respective substitutes.

41. Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on Thursday, 27 October 2022 were agreed and signed by the Chair.

42. Declarations of Interest

Cllr Leslie Pearton declared an interest as his daughter was a prison officer at Warren Wood.

43. Knife Crime and Serious Youth Violence Topic Review

The Committee were provided with the final recommendations of the Knife Crime and Serious Youth Violence Topic Review that were previously reported to the Committee.

Members were asked to note and comment upon the recommendations of the Topic Review Group and offer any further suggestions that could be submitted to the next Gravesham Community Safety Partnership meeting in January 2023.

Cllr Tony Rana, as Chair of the Review Group, guided members through the report and explained that the Topic Review concluded that there were several key tasks that should be taken on board and progressed via Gravesham's CSP namely:

- That partners needed to ensure that knife crime and serious youth violence statistics are not provided/shared in isolation but alongside supporting contextual information to give a more accurate picture of the level and nature of these crimes. This is particularly important when statistics/data are being made available in the public domain
- That the CSP review and agree the best means to communicate information on crime issues with local people, to keep them informed of the 'real' level of violent crime in the Borough i.e., that compared to many areas (including some other Kent Districts), crime in Gravesham is not high and the Borough is a safe place in which to live and work. This will help to build confidence, maintain perspective and challenge poor perceptions that may be held
- That efforts be made to raise awareness of the wide range of youth activities that are available to young people across the Borough, most of which are free of charge, and how to access them so that more young people will be encouraged to take part
- To understand and promote the beneficial role of Neighbourhood Watch in local communities, review the current number of active Schemes, identify areas in which Schemes could be introduced and to explore opportunities to support the expansion of Neighbourhood Watch Schemes more broadly within Gravesham.

The Committee raised concerns that there was a general fear of reporting crimes by residents in the Borough which meant that a large number of crimes weren't being reported to the Police. Members asked that the wording in the report be amended from 'actual crime' to 'reported crime'.

In response to a Member's question concerning sentences for carrying knives, the Inspector, Kent Police advised that carrying a knife was a serious offence and currently, certain groups were lobbying for mandatory prison sentences for anyone caught carrying a knife. There were two types of charges that could be made; flick knives/butterfly knives etc were classified as a bladed article and items such as a screwdriver could be classed as an offensive weapon.

The Inspector, Kent Police further explained that the joint operation with British Transport Police and the knife arches placed at the train station were preventative work; they sent out a message to the public that people carrying knives weren't wanted in Gravesham and they would be targeted by Police. The Inspector, Kent Police acknowledged that the knife arches could contribute to the raising of public fears about the level of knife crime but described them as essential for keeping knife crime from spilling out of areas such as London. The Inspector, Kent Police described a recent example of a young lad that was caught with a knife as a result of the joint operation and they felt they need to carry a knife to protect themselves..

The Committee thanked the officers and the Police for their hard work in completing the review.

Members noted the recommendations of the Topic Review Group and agreed for them to be submitted next Gravesham Community Safety Partnership meeting in January 2023

44. Town Centre Topic Review

The Committee were provided with the findings and recommendations of the Town Centre Crime Topic Review.

Members were asked to consider and comment upon the findings of the Topic Review Group and on the recommendations to be submitted to the next Gravesham Community Safety Partnership meeting in January 2023 as detailed in the report.

Cllr John Caller guided Members through the report and directed their attention to 2.4 of the report which held the suggestions for addressing the issues identified in the Town.

Cllr Caller advised that having considered experiences and discussed possible suggestions for addressing the issues identified, the Topic Review Group agreed the following final recommendations:

- That there should be a concerted campaign aimed at changing public perceptions of Gravesend through accurate and positive reporting of the 'real' levels of crime so that fear of crime and negative impressions of risks to personal safety can be minimised
- Working in partnership is essential to continue achieving further reductions in crime (and ASB) - this includes not just statutory services and businesses but local residents too. Underlining the message of the need to report incidents is crucial to ensuring that partnership activity and any additional resources are properly targeted
- There needs to be more effective communication of 'good news' about what the town centre has to offer, ongoing improvements and planned activities, to encourage a greater footfall both in the daytime and the evenings, so that Gravesend builds a reputation of as a safe socialising environment
- Greater awareness of the range of existing activities that are available for young people to access needs to be achieved to encourage take-up together with more consultation with young people about what they feel they would like to see made available to them
- Subject to resources, a series of community events should be held to promote Gravesham as a whole
- The displaying of messages about expected standards of behaviour e.g., 'Anti-Social Behaviour will not be tolerated' to be promoted
- Consideration should be given to the creation of a separate website

dedicated to celebrating good news about the Borough e.g., Amazing Gravesham, to supplement the Council's website which is primarily focused on services and the Discover Gravesham website which concentrates on information for visitors and tourists.

The Assistant Director (Communities) directed Members attention to 2.4.2 of the report which held suggestions that were raised outside of the meeting but would still be incorporated into the recommendations if necessary.

The Committee thanked the officers for their hard work in completing the review.

Members noted the recommendations of the Topic Review Group and agreed for them to be submitted next Gravesham Community Safety Partnership meeting in January 2023

45. Policing Update

The Committee were given an oral update on Police work in the Borough by Inspector James Beautridge from Kent Police.

The Inspector, Kent Police advised that recent statistics had shown that crime had fallen in the Borough; the biggest of which was cases of anti-social behaviour which had fallen 38% across Gravesham.

The Inspector, Kent Police further outlined the following key points:

- Additional resources had been allocated due to the football World Cup being held in November/December 2022; highly visible Police would be walking around the Town Centre and pubs in the Borough would be covered by roving Police patrols. The Safer Spaces scheme had been promoted and early visits had already been conducted to licenced premises
- Police Officer numbers in the Town Centre would be boosted at Christmas to combat any spike in retail thefts; a number of offenders were due to be released from prison soon and uniformed officers would be welcoming them back to the Borough with visits to their homes
- The Community Safety Shop would be set up in the St George's Centre in December 2022 and would be staffed by council officers and Kent Police
- Kent Police attended a recent PACT meeting with Cllr Milner in the Riverside wards as well as a walk and talk event in Lawrence Square with Housing Officers which proved successful. Those events were held monthly in different areas
- The Inspector, Kent Police promoted the 'My Community Voice' website and asked that Members sign up to it as it was an excellent way of getting in touch with Kent Police and reporting issues
- Crime had decreased at the Promenade since it became more heavily policed with uniformed and plain clothed patrols at work there. Robberies had decreased since the summer as all three criminals who had conducted the robberies were in prison. There was still some low level ASB and drug dealing in the area
- Recent funding received from the Home Office meant that there would be more uniformed patrols in hot spot areas
- Weapon offences had risen but that was a good thing as it meant that the Police were searching the right people and getting the weapons and the offenders off the streets

In response to a Member's question about unreported crime the Inspector, Kent Police advised that they were only able to go by the statistics for reported crime; the statistics showed that overall crime was dropping in the Borough, but it did not take into account cases of unreported crime. The Inspector, Kent Police agreed to share the crime statistics for Gravesham with Members outside of the meeting

In response to further questions from Members, the Chief Inspector and Inspector for Kent Police explained that:

- Kent Police drew on other intelligence for example, officers worked with hospitals to monitor any patient admissions that suffered knife injuries but hadn't reported anything; that data would be compared with Police held data to ensure that nothing had been missed. Data was also gathered from neighbouring districts to see if Gravesham's reported crime was lower than theirs, but Members were advised that Gravesham was statistically the one of the safest districts in North Kent
- Kent Police held the highest crime recording accuracy in the Country
- When a victim informed the Police that a crime had happened multiple times in the past then each time would be catalogued as an individual offence; there were stringent Home Office rules in place to record those offences
- Kent Police were very active during Hate Crime Awareness Week; the Independent Police Advisory Group met and discussed hate crime awareness at length, and it was also discussed at multi faith forums with external partners. There was a lot of internal awareness and training conducted within the Police force with regards to hate crime awareness
- Kent Police had a dedicated County Lines task force who communicated regularly with other forces such as the Metropolitan Police and Essex regarding County Lines behaviour and the sharing of tactics. There were dedicated resources at different Policing levels and County Lines gangs were a county wide issue however they had been reduced in Gravesham in recent years. Joint operations were conducted with the British Transport Police (BTP) to make intervention points such as Gravesend Train Station. The Inspector, Kent Police reassured Members that they spoke with a lot of different Police authorities across the Country and a significant amount of research was undertaken for their warrants
- There was an ongoing investigation into the shops in the Town Centre that were selling illegal tobacco products and the Inspector, Kent Police assured Members that they were disrupting the illegal sales but couldn't say more as it was an ongoing investigation
- Public visibility of uniformed officers greatly helped to reduce anti-social behaviour especially around places like McDonald's; officers had a great relationship with staff at McDonald's and they utilised the GSAFE system. The Inspector, Kent Police advised that the upcoming Halloween weekend had additional resources assigned to it; the whole of the Town Centre Team and Police officers were on lates and would cover all of the Town Centre. Special Constables purely targeting anti-social behaviour would also be on patrol. Warning letters had been circulated to repeat offenders and children who were known troublemakers had been visited at their houses and warned in front of their parents
- The weekend after, fireworks weekend, would follow the same protocol as Halloween weekend
- Kent Police visited most shops that sold fireworks to warn them of not selling to underage teenagers and gave them posters with warnings to put up in their

premises. Officers has also asked them not to sell large volumes of eggs or flour to any young people due to the risk of them using them for anti-social purposes

- Officers also attended schools and gave talks about various issues
- The Inspector, Kent Police encouraged any Members that wanted to join the patrols at the Halloween weekend to contact himself and something could be arranged
- The Inspector, Kent Police apologised to Cllr Elliott as he had not been informed of the movement of the PCSOs in Riverview; a review of Neighbourhood Policing across Kent had been recently conducted but the results were not available yet. The Inspector, Kent Police assured Cllr Elliott that the PCSO list would be updated next week and properly communicated to all parties
- With regard to an ongoing investigation in Riverview concerning motorbikes in residential areas, the Chief Inspector, Kent Police advised that he couldn't comment on an ongoing investigation but assured Members that the Inspector's team had dedicated a lot of time to dealing with motorbike anti-social behaviour. The Chief Inspector, Kent Police advised that he was happy to discuss the matter further with Cllr Elliott outside of the meeting

The Strategic Manager (CSU) added that during Hate Crime Awareness Week, the Council worked with the Community Liaison Officers from Kent Police, the Gr@nd and other external partners and joined in a lot of community engagement activity. The Council provided a lot of merchandise and literature in the Town Centre to encourage the public to report all incidents of hate crime. Unfortunately, the Council's Community Safety Unit did not engage in the week as they didn't have the staff capacity this year. The seasonal CSP shop would be open though and information was available to the public to ensure they reported any hate crime during the World Cup.

With regard to reported crime statistics, the Strategic Manager (CSU) advised that she reviewed the crime statistics in the last twelve months and compared them to the twelve month statistics pre-pandemic and it showed that total crime had fallen. During the pandemic crime rates drastically reduced nationally, and as expected, crime levels started to return to normal in the last 12 months. The majority of Kent Districts and Medway were seeing crime levels return to their previous rates at a far quicker rate than Gravesham with the Kent average increase being higher than Gravesham's.

In response to a Member's question about the rise in domestic abuse over the pandemic, the Strategic Manager (CSU) advised that:

- There was an increase in reported cases during the pandemic
- The most recent data on domestic abuse cases revealed that there had been an increase in reporting of domestic abuse cases compared to the previous twelve months. Members were advised that this rise could also be in part due to the significant local campaigning that has been undertaken to encourage victims to come forward and report their domestic abuse.
- On average, most victims didn't come forward until they had been abused thirty times so an increased reporting rate meant that more victims were receiving help
- The Council are signed up to the White Ribbon campaign and has previously been the recipient of three years of Home Office funding to raise awareness of all the different types of domestic abuse including male against female, female against male, inter family and even some types of modern slavery which fell within the definition of domestic abuse. The three-year project had delivered considerable

partnership work to tackle domestic abuse and violence against women and girls, which again may have encouraged victims locally to come forward.

- Gravesham is the only district in Kent that has a dedicated multi-agency Modern Slavery Working Group as an operational group of the CSP. The local approach is being replicated in other parts of Kent as a good practice model.
- A one stop shop for domestic abuse victims was being held on Thursday mornings where the public were able to drop in and seek out advice or assistance; the shop had proved very successful so far
- Members were invited to attend the domestic abuse conference on 15 November 2022; the conference has been advertised on social media and Communications had worked hard to promote the domestic abuse services available
- Cllr Harding had previously raised concerns for victims of domestic abuse who were hard of hearing and needed additional support to escape their abuse; the team raised that with the Domestic Abuse Partnership Board. As a result, some training sessions being rolled out in October and November included sign language interpreters
- Unfortunately, the team did not keep track of the outcomes of cases or prosecutions, but the Strategic Manager (CSU) was sure the information could be accessed and circulated to Members if requested. Members were reminded that the most important part was that victims had access to the support services available and were actively using the services

The Chair thanked the officers for an information update.

46. Safer Streets Round 4 Project

The Strategic Manager (CSU) advised that a detailed written report would be brought to the next meeting in January 2023.

The Strategic Manager (CSU) gave a verbal update to the Committee on the main headlines of the Safer Street Round 4 Project:

- The team worked with a colleague at the Police Crime Commissioners (PCC) office to work on a bid for Home Office funding; the bid was successful and approximately £62K was granted. That was matched by the Council's own funds. By January 2023 the project should have had more time to develop
- The project included eight new permanent CCTV cameras for the Town Centre.
- The Council were looking at upgrading seventy heritage streetlamps, thirty-seven of which would be funded by the Home Office funding. Planning permission for the lamps was sought and the design had been approved; the work just had to be programmed into the schedule
- The footpath from the Overcliffe to the Thamesway/industrial park area had been left unmaintained for years; the vegetation would be cut back, the fly tipping cleared, lighting improved, and two cameras covering the entry and exit points installed as part of the project
- The team worked closely with the GSAFE radio system; the Council wanted to encourage more businesses to sign up to the scheme but some of the businesses had been hit hard over the pandemic and couldn't afford to join. To combat that, the project included funds to purchase twenty new radios to give to willing businesses on a free six-month trial. Part of the fund would also be spent to fix the recent issue with

radio link where the signal between security staff and Police had been negatively affected

- Included within the bid was a target of twenty 'safe spaces' within business premises in the Town Centre; anyone who felt vulnerable could go to one of those 'safe spaces' and request the need to use it to staff who would all be trained to deal with any issues. Bystander training would also be given to Council staff and night-time business staff too
- A conference social event was held every year and held discussions around domestic abuse, harassment, stalking, modern slavery and alcohol abuse etc; the event encourages people of all diversities to join in and an event is planned for March
- Two night time economy audits were planned to be completed; the first audit was completed in October 2022 and the second was due to be completed in September 2023. Council officers and a few Members went out in the Town Centre between 17:00pm and the early hours of the next morning on a Friday night in order to see what the Town Centre was like during those hours. A survey was carried out with public and business representatives and further information would be gathered at the next night time audit in 2023

A number of suggestions were raised by the Committee:

- The programme used for installing the heritage streetlamps should also include a programme of planned maintenance instead of just reacting when a streetlamp stopped working
- The Chair of Licensing Committee needed to be contacted prior to the next night time audit so that he was able to attend
- The previous dial in number for the CCTV control room should be reinstated as that would allow businesses that didn't want to be part of the GSAFE system to still be able to contact the CCTV room and advise them of times and places when criminal activity had occurred

The Strategic Manager (CSU) agreed to the first two suggestions however the Assistant Director (Communities) advised that the old number was likely a by-product of when the CCTV control was based in Gravesend, but it had since relocated. However, the Assistant Director (Communities) agreed to raise the matter with GSAFE.

The Chair thanked the Strategic Manager (CSU) for the detailed update.

47. 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 Thursday, 16 June 2022.

The Committee noted the minutes.

Close of meeting

The meeting ended at 20:37pm.