

MAIDSTONE BOROUGH COUNCIL

OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON TUESDAY 18 OCTOBER 2022

Attendees:

Committee Members:	Councillors English (Chairman), Cannon, Mrs Blackmore, Brice, Cleator, Conyard, Garten, Hinder, Jeffery, Knatchbull, T Wilkinson and Brindle
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13. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were received from Councillors Hastie and McKenna.

Councillor Blackmore stated that she would be leaving the meeting at 8 p.m., with it noted that Councillor Jeffery would arrive during the course of the meeting, due to pre-existing commitments.

14. NOTIFICATION OF SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS

Councillor Brindle was present as Substitute Member for Councillor McKenna.

15. URGENT ITEMS

There were no urgent items.

16. NOTIFICATION OF VISITING MEMBERS

There were no Visiting Members.

17. DISCLOSURES BY MEMBERS AND OFFICERS

There were no disclosures by Members and Officers.

18. DISCLOSURES OF LOBBYING

There were no disclosures of lobbying.

19. EXEMPT ITEMS

RESOLVED: That all items be taken in public as proposed.

20. MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 6 OCTOBER 2022

RESOLVED: That the Minutes of the Meeting held on 6 October 2022 be approved as a correct record and signed.

21. PRESENTATION OF PETITIONS

There were no petitions.

22. QUESTION AND ANSWER SESSION FOR LOCAL RESIDENTS

There were no questions from Local Residents.

23. QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS TO THE CHAIRMAN

There were no questions from Members to the Chairman.

24. SAFETY REVIEW - EXTERNAL STAKEHOLDER CONSULTATION

The Democratic Services Officer briefly introduced the report, referencing the example questions included within point 2.4 of the report that the Committee could use and/or adapt in consulting the external stakeholders present at the meeting.

The attendees were as follows, with each attendee having provided the Committee with a brief introduction on their organisation and their role within it:

- Martyn Jeynes, Community and Strategic Partnerships Manager (Maidstone Borough Council)
- Mark McLellan, District Commander (Kent Police)
- Steve Kent, Inspector (Kent Police)
- Ellen Shaw, Youth Hub Delivery Manager Maidstone (Kent County Council)
- Ilsa Butler, Bid Manager (One Maidstone)
- Emma Price, Violence Reduction Unit Co-Ordinator (Kent and Medway Violence Reduction Unit)

The Chairman explained that representatives from Golding Homes, Mid-Kent College and The Mall were unavailable to attend the meeting; however written responses would be provided to any questions raised during the meeting specifically for those stakeholders.

In response to questions, the Community and Strategic Partnerships Manager outlined the actions being implemented through the Safer Streets Funding, which included the provision of Bystander training, the renovations proposed to Brenchley Gardens to provide a designated space for police monitoring, the use of control tools such as drinks covers to distribute to users of the night-time economy and additional CCTV cameras for Brewer Street; the maintenance of those cameras would be accounted for through the service's existing Council budget. One Maidstone would be co-ordinating the funding and support for the 'Best Bar None' initiative, with an aspiration for an annual review of the scheme to become standard practice in future years beyond the safer streets funding period.

The funding provided was short term, and it was stated that it was difficult to deliver the types of projects being undertaken by the Town Centre Task Force (TCTF) across short timescales. The financial contributions provided by Golding Homes and One Maidstone to support the TCTF were noted. The positive performance and importance of the partnership working demonstrated through the TCTF and the Council's work with partner agencies was emphasised; in part, this intended to address factors that may lead to or contribute to traumatic childhood experiences, which in turn could lead to unwanted behaviour in later years.

Several Members of the Committee questioned the attending witnesses on the reporting of crime and use of data. The Chief Inspector emphasised that caution should be taken in reviewing 'snap-shots' of crime data, with a full data set likely to demonstrate the successes of the partnership working; consideration should be given to the fact that residents had felt comfortable to report the crimes taking place. The Chief Inspector stated that partnership working was a priority to Kent Police.

The Community and Strategic Partnerships Manager confirmed that the borough's crime statistics would be reviewed as part of the Council's annual strategic assessment in early 2023, before their publication within the Community Safety Plan (CSP). The CSP would be considered by the Committee in March 2023. It was expected that the level of crime, particularly serious crime, would decrease given the partnership working in place, with the Shepway Task Force having achieved a 33% reduction in serious crime alongside a net increase in the reporting of crime, during its operation.

The importance of collective partnership working to promote the night-time economy was highlighted, with reference to the World Cup, Christmas and post-Christmas periods. The Chief Inspector outlined the actions being taken by Kent Police in ensuring public safety during the World Cup. The Bid Manager highlighted One Maidstone's six-weekly night-time economy forum, which was attended by local venues and partner agencies. From this, Kent Police were informed of events such as sports screenings to ensure that the appropriate resources were available. The Bid Manager stated that if Members would like to receive further communications on the forum's discussions, this could be facilitated.

The Community and Strategic Partnerships Manager stated that the rates of domestic abuse (DA) would likely be affected these time periods and the national economic position, but that the Council and its partnership organisations were working on a series of initiatives to address DA. This included the Domestic Abuse Safety Plan, Domestic Abuse Safety Forum and the promotion of the 'one stop shop' at the Council's Trinity Building; the latter had been a crucial service for the Council to deliver in providing assistance to victims. The provision of DA training across multiple organisations to raise awareness of the signs of, and disclosures around DA was outlined.

During the discussion, several Members of the Committee emphasised the importance of communications to the wider public, as it was felt that these could be improved. This included publicising successful interventions, the positive performance of partnership working and the importance of publicising the contact details for services such as DA. In response, the Democratic Services Officer was requested to distribute the DA forum's upcoming events and contact details to the Committee, for information and re-distribution.

The Community and Strategic Partnerships Manager reiterated that a significant portion of the Safer Streets Funding was designated for communications. It was stated that the communications teams of the respective partnership agencies aligned their communications to synonymously publicise the work undertaken. The Chief Inspector stated that they were aware of the Committee's desire for improved communications from having watched the 6 October 2022 meeting, and that they would consider how Kent Police communicated the achievements made with Members, town centre business owners and the wider public in response. Members were requested to continue reporting crime, to assist Kent Police in

directing resources and implementing the OSARA problem solving technique as required.

The work of the TCTF and Community Safety Teams was usually publicised within each of the Council's Borough Insight Magazines, with the upcoming issues to again include one-and-a-half pages on the partnership and One Maidstone's Street Pastors. It was requested that the contact details for those organisations and the DA forum be included.

Several Members of the Committee expressed concern at the increased usage of Nitrus Oxide. In response, the Community and Strategic Partnerships Manager explained that only the sale, rather than possession, of Nitrus oxide was a criminal offence which made it difficult to address.

The use of vaping devices was more prevalent in the town centre than Nitrus oxide use, with the former being a public health crisis nationally. The Council worked jointly with the Kent and Medway Violence Reduction Unit (K&MVRU) and Kent County Council to raise the profile of vaping. The TCTF proactively sought to obtain closure orders for those businesses within the town centre that distributed vaping devices and Nitrus oxide to young people, where linked to anti-social behaviour and the unlawful provision of those substances to young people. Nitrus oxide usage within the borough's rural areas had been raised with the Kent Substance Misuse Alliance (KSMA) and local services. The Community and Strategic Partnerships Manager stated that the link to the public consultation on the KSMA's strategy would be provided to the Committee.

The Committee were informed that One Maidstone would be completing a 'Bid Term 2' document, which would track the opening and operation of shops within the town centre across the past five years. This would assist in managing these types of concerns, alongside assisting the TCTF in policing the area as a residential and commercial district.

The Community and Strategic Partnership Manager outlined the types of evidence that were required in obtaining a closure order, with the TCTF having a fortnightly strategic operations meetings focusing on the 'pursue' workstream, with partner organisations sharing information to assist in the actions being taken.

In response to questions on One Maidstone's services provided, the Bid Manager stated that there were four Street Ambassadors that would address any matter compromising the town centre's vitality. This included anti-social behaviour. The Street Ambassadors worked between 7 a.m. to 5.30 p.m. across the town centre footprint, which included Brenchley Gardens and the northern part of Week Street. The Bid Manager stated that Maidstone Business Improvement District was often used as an example of best practice to other BIDs, due to the partnership working in place which was felt to be a fantastic opportunity. An example of the partnership working in place was that the town centre CCTV equipment and associated data belonged to the Council but was operated by One Maidstone; the costs were underwritten by the businesses within the BID.

Several Members of the Committee questioned the provision of training and youth services, as part of the overarching work being conducted by the partnership. In response, the Community and Strategic Partnerships Manager stated that the Council was working with two other Local Authorities, and the K&MVRU to provide a Bystander training package for the Maidstone Borough. The training would be

provided to security teams, businesses and those operating within the night-time economy, to support them in their 'professional curiosity' and identify individuals that may be at low-to-medium risk of exploitation. The K&MVRU were leading on training trainers to deliver the Bystander training from around November or December 2022, alongside training from the Boys2Men. The training provided would be delivered with the relevant partnering organisations, such as Kent County Council and family liaison officers. Further information would be provided to the Committee when available.

The Violence Reduction Unit Co-Ordinator outlined the activities available at Maidstone Youth Hub, which were free to access. The importance of education was emphasised, with the K&MVRU working to change the language used in association with young individuals, such as the incorrect usage of the word 'gang'. The Bystander training would be provided to young people, addressing the language used around reporting an issue versus 'snitching', to remove those barriers. Another aim was to reach out to those individuals that may be vulnerable or at risk of exploitation, with the buddy tagging system outlined, which had been successful for those that had used it well. In February 2023, an event would be held for young people across Kent, alongside the Hope Collective, to encourage young people to outline the issues in their communities and areas for change. The event would be attended by a public figure to talk to the young individuals in attend about their early life experiences and how these had been overcome.

In response to questions, the Violence Reduction Unit Co-Ordinator referenced the placement of the Knife Angle in Brenchley Gardens, stating that 30 knives had been handed in during its display. The K&MVRU had also facilitated workshops with local schools at the Hazlitt Theatre on educating young people on knife crime. The importance of training was reiterated however the Committee were advised that it was important to ensure that individuals, particularly young males, did not feel marginalised, as feedback from schools indicated that this had occurred. Local schools had been asked to join the Commitment Pledge, which focused on keeping pupils safe from knife and violent crime.

The partnership working taking place to provide local youth services was highlighted, with the Youth Hub Delivery Manager stating that 326 youth club would be open on weekends and supported by Outreach Youth Workers after 6 p.m. if needed, to provide suitable support to young people. The Community and Strategic Partnerships Manager stated that the funding for the club had been secured by the K&MVRU and would be staffed by KCC's Youth Services, with the Council to train the security guards. The lease for the club had been taken out on by One Maidstone on the Council's behalf.

The Committee expressed that the work undertaken by the TCTF and the Council's partner agencies including those that had attended the meeting, was extremely positive, with specific reference made to the youth services being provided. The need to improve the communications being produced to highlight this work was reiterated. The role of Members in supporting the services provided and engaging with young people was raised, including through direct contact such as by attending external meetings, such as the Maidstone Youth Forum, conducting site visits to the partnership organisations and through raising the work undertaken with their respective political groups.

The Youth Hub Delivery Manager stated that Councillors would be welcome to attend a meeting of the Maidstone Youth Forum; the forum was currently identifying their top five issues of importance.

Ahead of the meeting's closure, the external attendees in attendance were asked to consider the following question, with an answer to be provided at a later date:

'What would you like Maidstone Borough Council to do, that we are not doing?'

The Committee also wished for the below questions to be put to the Housing Associations operating within the Town Centre:

'How do you (as an organisation) deal with Anti-Social Behaviour issues in relation to enforcing your tenancy agreements?'

'Would you (as an organisation) like to consider setting up a specific email response system for Members of Parliament and Councillors (in reporting issues of anti-social behaviour)?'

The attendees were thanked for their contributions to the meeting, as part of the evidence collection process to the review.

RESOLVED: That the safety review be continued at the next available meeting of the Committee.

Note:

Councillor Brice arrived at 6.33 p.m., confirming that whilst she was a Council Representative on the One Maidstone BID Advisory Board, she had no disclosures of interest or lobbying to declare.

Councillor Jeffery arrived at 7.14 p.m., confirming that he had no disclosures of interest or lobbying to declare.

Councillor Blackmore left the meeting at 8.06 p.m.

25. DURATION OF MEETING

6.30 p.m. to 8.31 p.m.