

MAIDSTONE BOROUGH COUNCIL

OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON WEDNESDAY 12 JUNE 2024

Attendees:

Committee Members:	Councillors Russell (Chairman), Cannon, Cooke, Fort, Harper, Higson, Kehily, Khadka, McKay, M Naghi, Oliver, Rodwell and J Wilkinson
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6. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Field and Parfitt-Reid.

7. NOTIFICATION OF SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS

The following Substitute Members were noted:

- Councillor Khadka for Councillor Field
- Councillor Fort for Councillor Parfitt-Reid

8. URGENT ITEMS

There were no urgent items.

9. NOTIFICATION OF VISITING MEMBERS

There were no Visiting Members.

10. DISCLOSURES BY MEMBERS AND OFFICERS

There were no disclosures by Members or Officers.

11. DISCLOSURES OF LOBBYING

There were no disclosures of lobbying.

12. EXEMPT ITEMS

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

13. MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 13 APRIL 2023

RESOLVED: That the Minutes of the meeting held on 13 April 2023 be approved as a correct record and signed.

14. PRESENTATION OF PETITIONS

There were no petitions.

15. QUESTION AND ANSWER SESSION FOR LOCAL RESIDENTS

There were no questions from Local Residents.

16. QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS TO THE CHAIRMAN

There were no questions from Members.

17. STRATEGIC ASSESSMENT 2024/25 AND PARTNERSHIP PLAN UPDATE

The Community and Strategic Partnerships Manager introduced the report, on behalf of the Safer Maidstone Partnership (SMP). Chief Inspector, Mark McLellan and Community Safety Inspector, Steve Kent, were also in attendance to respond to questions. Pre-meeting feedback from the Chairman and Vice-Chairman was acknowledged to consider ways to reduce jargon and use less acronyms for any future reports. The importance of information sharing from Members was reiterated, as police resources were directed to areas where crime was reported.

The Community Safety Partnership's core priorities, which were on track and in some cases exceeding expectations, were highlighted. To:

- Protect our communities against serious, violent, and organised crime (including modern-day slavery);
- Reduce the harm caused by domestic abuse;
- Provide a safe town centre (exceeding expectations); and
- Keep children and young people safe.

The Community and Strategic Partnerships Manager thanked Members for their patience and support with the new Neighbourhood Policing Model and advised that, while there had been great successes with the Town Centre Task Force, they would remain vigilant to potential issues that could arise from circumstances like the cost of living crisis. The document was expected to adapt and evolve according to circumstances, with a new 2025-28 plan to be compiled in the next six months.

Several Members expressed praise for the content and format of the report and for the new Neighbourhood Policing Model and youth services such as the 326 Youth Hub and Cadet Force as having made a positive difference in the community. Concerns were raised over the future of these services and that public perception of crime seemed to be higher than the reality of the presented figures.

In response to queries, the Community and Strategic Partnership Manager stated that:

- Ward clusters with higher rates of crime were assigned as smaller zones to aid assigned beat officers to be more effective. The Chief Inspector added that there was overlap between areas to allow for flexibility and that they hoped to be fully staffed by September through recruitment in Summer and Autumn;

- Negative public perception tended to be generated through social media. This could be helped through Members sharing factual reports, statistics and positive achievements with residents;
- High importance was placed on embracing equality and diversity and the changing demographic in the town centre. This was being done through initiatives such as providing service posters in different languages;
- The 326 Youth Hub, introduced to combat anti-social behaviour spikes during school end times, provided a safe place for young people to go, reduce future violent crime, provide support not available in schools and free up town security staff to have more capacity in the nighttime economy. Funding was secured from Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) / Section 106 monies to secure a further year of rent and discussions are ongoing with a local charity to help secure the units longer term future and expansion into a Town Centre based indoor wheeled sport facility once an appropriate location is found; and
- They would continue to work in partnership with Kent County Council (KCC) on their new model focussed on supporting younger years through trauma and bereavement.

The Chief Inspector thanked Members for their positive feedback relating to the improvements in Brenchley Gardens and general presence of the beat officers. In response to queries concerning Fleming House, it was advised that they have regular meetings with the probation services and intended to approach them again to discuss any additional support they could give.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted, alongside the comments made by the Committee.

18. DURATION OF MEETING

6.30 p.m. to 7.32 p.m.