MAIDSTONE BOROUGH COUNCIL

MINUTES OF THE PARTNERSHIPS AND WELL-BEING OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE MEETING HELD ON MONDAY 14 MARCH 2011

PRESENT: Councillors Butler, Ms Griffin, D Mortimer, Mrs Parvin and Paterson

ALSO PRESENT: Councillors Brindle and Nelson-Gracie.

94. The Committee to consider whether all items on the agenda should be web-cast

Resolved: That all items be web-cast.

95. Apologies

Councillor Heather Langley, Councillor Paulina Stockell and Michael Hill, Kent Police Associations Co-opted Member sent their apologies.

96. Notification of Substitute Members

It was noted that Councillor Adrian Brindle was substituting for Councillor Heather Langley and Councillor Nelson-Gracie was substituting for Councillor Paulina Stockell.

97. Notification of Visiting Members

Councillor Brian Vizzard attended as a Visiting Member, interested in agenda item 8 and 9 on the agenda, Update from the Safer Maidstone Partnership and Update from Kent Police. Councillor Ian Chittenden attended as a Visiting Member as the co-opted Member from the Kent Police Association was not able to attend.

98. Disclosures by Members and Officers:

There were no disclosures.

99. To consider whether any items should be taken in private because of the possible disclosure of exempt information

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

100. Minutes of the Meeting Held on 8 February 2011

Resolved: That the minutes of the meeting held on 8 February 2011 be agreed as a correct record of the meeting and duly signed by the Chairman.

101. Update from the Safer Maidstone Partnership

The Chairman welcomed Martin Adams, Chair of the Safer Maidstone Partnership (SMP) and Zena Cooke, Director of Regeneration and Communities to the meeting.

Mr Adams began by addressing the issues faced by the SMP including the future economic environment and local needs. He explained that they had taken the opportunity to look at their 9 priorities and rationalise them. The 9 priorities, he explained, had now been reduced to 4: Anti Social Behaviour; Domestic Violence; Road Safety; and Drug & Substance Misuse. He explained that the group's decision was supported by the strategic assessment which had looked at all areas of the partnership; data and information. Mr Adams felt that the SMP now had a clear direction for the next 12 months. The composition of the SMP was described as a good mixture of committed people with a range of expertise, coming from various organisations including Highways.

Members confirmed that alcohol misuse was picked up under the priority: Drug and Substance misuse. Mr Adams explained the importance of the Town Centre to this priority and that there would be a focus on this area. Members questioned the responsibility of the Partnership to the Rural Areas if there was to be this emphasis placed on the Town Centre and the High Street Ward. Mr Adams explained that in terms of Road Safety rural areas were a priority and by the same measure the High Street ward's issues were focused around relevant priorities chosen by the SMP. There was no intention that this would compromise the SMP's support of other areas in the borough. Mr Adams explained that he had chaired a working group which included many organisations such as Maidstone Mediation and Golding Homes and it was on this basis with the input from other organisations that it was felt that the regard for issues in the High Street ward should not be lost, with statistics proving the need for focus as it was disproportionately generating more anti social behavioural issues but again he emphasised that the 4 priorities were borough based.

Members questioned the spending cuts and how they would affect the work of the SMP. They queried whether the left over funds could be carried forward. Zena Cook responded by explaining to the Committee that the funding came from Kent County Council and they were in dialogue with them about keeping money left over from the current year as there would be less expected next year. The Officer went on to explain that the partnership had recently provided funding for Porchlight and for Crime Prevention initiatives at their last meeting and as such were not waiting for April, they were continuing to make decisions and funding allocations. A 20% reduction in funding was expected. The Officer emphasised to Members that they would have less money but would still

have money and went on to explain the work already completed by the Local Strategic Partnership (LSP) on Resource Mapping. Resource mapping identified public money coming into Maidstone and how it was spent which put them in good stead for the future. The Committee was told that Mr Adams was coordinating activities and the stakeholder events organised by Sarah Robson that had been held on Domestic Violence and most recently Road Safety had brought partners together as a means of combining resources. Ms Cook told Members that it would be a difficult year in terms of being able to plan but the principles agreed put them in a good position for when funding was allocated.

Members asked whether the Partnership had a viewpoint on the proposed changes to CCTV in Maidstone and also asked the witnesses present if they felt there were links to drug and alcohol misuse and burglary. Matthew Nix, Chief Superintendent at Kent Police responded to the question on burglary and confirmed that there were national statistics that proved the link to drug and alcohol misuse which was taken into account by the police and was backed by academic research. Members raised concerns about the rise in gold exchange organisations that could make it easier for stolen goods to be sold. The officer explained that there was little that could be done with regard to the postal companies. With regard to local organisations the Officer explained that close working relationships with local organisations were maintained to counter the criminal element but this only worked with those with fixed premises. Members were told that this intervention proved successful in Maidstone. With reference to CCTV, Mr Nix told members that the priority was to provide 24/7 cover with a wider reference than the Town Centre and stressed the importance of rural areas. He said that whilst the 24/7 coverage was a priority it was the quality of service and public safety and how this could be maintained and increased that was of importance. Ms Cook gave the Committee the perspective of the SMP on CCTV, explaining there was no collective view on CCTV but that there had been consultation with all Members. She told the Committee that it was an exceptionally good service that should be maintained. There were divergent views on how outcomes were achieved but overall the opinion was that we must not lose the proactive effective elements of the service. Members questioned the real time issue and queried whether or not this was a problem and if it would be referred to in the report. Ms Cook explained the analogue and digital comparison and the delay between the two being a short 2-3 second delay. Delays could be eliminated in time but at a cost and it would be for the Cabinet Member to consider this in the report. The current system was analogue and video tapes were used so there was a technological issue to consider. Members discussed with Mr Nix his preference for maintaining a local CCTV service. He explained that it was about building relationships and a rapport with business but that this could still be achieved with the proposed move with visits. He explained his involvement with Swale who were already working in partnership with Medway on CCTV and he felt had a better service as a result. Reference was made to Maidstone being a regional centre for shopping and with a vibrant night time economy having different needs to an area like Swale. Ms Cook expressed her opinion that CCTV was not there solely to prevent crime and by holding on to all elements of CCTV we were narrowing what

we could achieve. It was the partnership between the local retailers that made it work.

Members raised questions about Anti Social Behaviour Orders (ASBOS) Mr Nix responded to this by explaining that there appeared to be a desire by the coalition government to move away from ASBOs as they were seen as a badge of honour and not effective.

Members questioned what the SMP were doing in terms of engaging the wider community with the 4 revised priorities. Officers explained that there were 4 working groups and they would be meeting with the Cabinet Member, John A Wilson to equate the priorities across the groups. In terms of community engagement and publicity the officers reflected on the recent Road Safety Event and the ideas that had been brought forth which included advertising on buses, to target scooter and motorcyclists via social networking sites such as Twitter and Facebook and a general desire to be more inventive in terms of engagement.

Councillors raised the 'Fit for the Road' Review that had previously been carried out by Scrutiny and suggested that this was revisited to ensure that the recommendations that had been made had been implemented. This suggestion was echoed by the SMP who were also keen to take this forward. Councillors emphasised the use of local knowledge in relation to speed limits in rural areas. The SMP were told that Parish Councils had requested 30 and 40mph speed limits in some areas where 50mph limits had been imposed emphasising the need for local knowledge and consultation with local people Mr Nix spoke from an enforcement perspective and explained that cameras based around hotspots were effective and agreed that flexibility to work with the local community was important. Members asked that the information regarding the 4 priorities was sent to Parish Councils; Ms Cook agreed that the SMP would be happy to do so and that the plan was to engage widely. She asked the Committee to consider the Local Strategic Partnership's input when looking at their work programme in the future.

The Chairman thanked Martin Adams and Zena Cook for attending.

It was resolved that the Committee would revisit the Fit for the Road review working in conjunction with the Safer Maidstone Partnership.

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The Chairman thanked Martin Adams and Zena Cook for attending.

It was resolved that the Committee would revisit the Fit for the Road review working in conjunction with the Safer Maidstone Partnership.

102. Update from Kent Police

The Chairman formally welcomed Chief Superintendent Matthew Nix to the meeting, joining Mrs Cook and Mr Adams.

Mr Nix began by referring to Ian Learmouth, the newly appointed Chief Constable, explaining that his priorities for Maidstone and Kent demonstrated a clear steer on Public Services.

Mr Nix explained the Change Programme which would accommodate the 20% reduction in budget over the next four years. He informed Members that there would be an operational policing model and that it was important to get this right first but also made reference to the 'back office' and said that no individual would be unaffected; everyone would have to think differently. There would also be a freeze on recruitment. Neighbourhood policing would be the bedrock of everything they were doing, he was pleased to say. They would be broadening frontline duties and there would a crucial sense of ownership for your 'patch'.

Maidstone would stay as a custody centre and the centre of divisional headquarters which he said he felt it needed to be as the county town. He expressed there needed to be senior management liaison at all level and included Inspector David Coleman, and a cross cutting relationship between the Town Centre and Councillors in this.

In his presentation Mr Nix, showed the new geographic police structure for Kent which would be divided into three areas; north, west and east. As Chief Superintendent of West Kent Division he would be a single point of contact and accountable for everything that happened in the vicinity. He explained the proposed new shift pattern which would provide local

flexibility with Officers on shift, when needed. He spoke of the 24/7 response based at Maidstone as something that had wanted to achieve from a managerial point of view for sometime and would be based on demand. Mr Nix highlighted the reduction in crime in Maidstone over the past 4 years. He explained that Maidstone had the lion's share of resources and would have ownership of 1st line response with no artificial boundaries, it would benefit from the closest response. This was highlighted as a big, structural change. He described a back to basics, core business approach in response to the budget cuts that would keep the impact minimum. Members were complimentary on the approach described and the idea of local ownership. They questioned the implementation timescale and were told that it would be in place by the end of the calendar year. Members questioned the Officer on staff awareness of the changes. Mr Nix responded that there was a huge amount of communication with weekly open meetings and questions and answer sessions with staff. Members questioned whether the cutbacks would result in greater powers for Police Community Support Officers (PCSOs). The Officer explained that it was a discretionary power that the new Chief Constable, Ian Learmouth, was in favour of enhancing. With regard to the spending review, he explained that the budget for PCSOs was ring fenced. The officer explained the huge amount of background work completed over the past year in line with the changes and that those selected to command would be developing over the next nine months. Kent Police Association Member (KPA), Councillor Chittenden, spoke of his involvement and his role in scrutinising the work of the Police which would continue over the next 12 months until they were replaced with Police Commissioners. Mr Nix returned to the changes and explained neighbourhood policing and its principles. The number of officers would depend upon the demand with details to come in April which would include implementation time. Once the details were known it would be communicated to the public.

Members congratulated Mr Nix on his appointment as Chief Superintendent of the West Kent Division particularly as positions were to be halved across Kent. Members questioned the capabilities of the new ways of working. The Officer explained that there would be the same capability in response policing and that he as well as front line Officers were confident that it would work. There would be less senior managers which would make communication and accountability easier and reinforce links between the control room and staff.

Links with other counties were explored by Members, Essex in particular. Mr Nix explained that Kent were not looking to merge with Essex but that there was collaboration on IT and procurement and that Kent could make use of their helicopter. The Serious Crime Directorate was based in Ebbsfleet and this shared service also saved Kent money, making the back office function cheaper to run with no significant impact on Maidstone. Councillor Chittenden reiterated this opinion and explained that the Serious Crime Directorate was similar to Maidstone Borough Council's partnership working. Members questioned staff morale. Mr Nix explained that whilst people wanted to live and work in the right place in order to

have a quality of life there was an enormous sense of goodwill within the police with the job being something of a vocation.

In response to Members questions Mr Nix explained that there had been an increase in PCSOs due to the freeze on recruitment and because the role was seen as a stepping stone in to the Police. Members referenced the crime statistics which showed a 5.7% reduction in crime in Kent. Mr Nix told members that Maidstone's Basic Command Unit (BSU) was the best performing in Kent and overall for Maidstone there had been a 2% reduction in crime which was the 5th continuous year. The Committee asked Mr Nix what his personal ambitions were. He told members that despite the changes he was confident the right ethos was in place to provide continuity for local people and to provide ownership on local issues.

Mr Nix discussed with Members the possibility of magistrate's courts harmonising to accommodate the new policing boundaries. Mr Nix felt that it would be better if this was to happen for the victim and witnesses so everything could be dealt with, within 'the patch' but he said he did not feel that this would happen across all partnerships. With regard to the new divisional boundaries of north, east and west Kent Members asked if the patrols and shifts had changed. Mr Nix explained that they had but they had work to do to ensure the model was correct and that once that happened there would be force wide changes across the county. He explained that the police federation was currently engaged with the force on working out shift patterns. Members were told that Maidstone would see an increase in staff and that the night time economy would benefit from the same officers building relationships with business and door staff.

The Officers were all thanked for attending the meeting.

It was resolved that: the Committee should be updated on the Change Programme at the time of implementation which will coincide with the Crime and Disorder Committee's next meeting.

103. INFORMATION: Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnership Scrutiny Protocols

104. Duration of Meeting

6.30pm to 8.25pm.