

MAIDSTONE BOROUGH COUNCIL

**MINUTES OF THE EXTERNAL OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY
COMMITTEE MEETING HELD ON MONDAY 7 SEPTEMBER
2009**

PRESENT: Councillor Hotson (Chairman)
Councillors Marchant, Mrs Gibson, Mrs Parvin,
Paterson, Yates and Warner

APOLOGIES: Councillors Batt and Sherreard

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

Resolved: That all items on the agenda be web-cast.

49. Apologies.

Apologies were received from Councillors Batt and Sherreard.

50. Notification of Substitute Members.

It was noted that Councillor Warner was substituting for Councillor Batt.

51. Notification of Visiting Members.

It was noted that Councillor Chittenden was a visiting Member with an interest in Agenda Item 8, "Scrutiny of the Safer Maidstone Partnership".

52. Disclosures by Members and Officers:

There were no disclosures.

53. 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.

54. Appointment of Co-optee.

Resolved: That Mr Brian Sangha be co-opted as a voting member of the Committee when it acted in its capacity as the Crime and Disorder Committee for 2009-10.

55. Scrutiny of the Safer Maidstone Partnership.

The Chairman welcomed the representatives of the Safer Maidstone Partnership (SMP) Strategy Group and reminded the Committee that there was now a statutory obligation to scrutinise the SMP. It was highlighted

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that the meeting was an opportunity to identify what the SMP did, how, and what the future held.

The SMP representatives then introduced themselves as:

- David Petford, Chief Executive of Maidstone Borough Council and Co-Chairman of the SMP;
- Chief Superintendent Alasdair Hope from Mid-Kent Police, who was in attendance in his capacity as the Co-Chairman of the SMP;
- Tim Thompson, an independent member of the Kent Police Authority (KPA);
- Molly Norley, Local Children's Services Partnership Manager for Maidstone 1 who was in attendance on behalf of Chris Jones from Kent County Council;
- Nick Silvester, Partnership Manager for South Division for Kent Fire and Rescue Service (KFRS);
- Chief Inspector David Pascoe, Maidstone Borough Commander from Mid-Kent Police; and
- Jessica Mookherjee, Assistant Director for Public Health at NHS West Kent (formerly the West Kent Primary Care Trust and referred to as "the PCT").

Chief Supt. Hope then outlined the responsibilities and structure of the SMP. The SMP, as a Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnership (CDRP) had a statutory responsibility to reduce crime, disorder, anti-social behaviour (ASB) and substance misuse. An additional responsibility to reduce re-offending in relation to criminal offences, ASB and substance misuse would be introduced next year. There were six statutory partners: the police, the local authority (in Maidstone's case this included the borough and the county council), the police authority, the primary care trust and the fire and rescue service. Kent Probation Service would be a statutory partner from early 2010 to help the SMP deliver its new responsibility in relation to re-offending. There was also a wide range of non-statutory partners including Maidstone Housing Trust and Maidstone Mediation. With regard to the organisation of the SMP, the Strategy Group was made up of the 6 statutory partners plus a selection of non-statutory partners; this was the key decision making group which could allocate resources, set priorities and performance targets, and hold to account delivery groups. The seven SMP delivery groups were made up of practitioners and linked to the statutory responsibilities. There was also "partnership tasking and co-ordination", whereby practitioners within delivery groups met once a fortnight to address very specific local issues. At these meetings, practitioners were provided with information and data to help them to make informed decisions on where to allocate the delivery group's resources. The Partnership was aware that the issues it was tackling were dynamic rather than static and were different according to location and time of day. The SMP therefore had to be flexible in order to respond to issues as they arose. A Community Safety Unit (CSU), comprising a multi-agency group of practitioners to share information and data amongst partners, was to be based in Maidstone House. This would allow all practitioners to agree quickly on courses of action. It was hoped that all SMP partners would join the CSU.

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Chief Supt. Hope informed Members that the business process model for the SMP was the National Intelligence Model (NIM). This allowed the SMP to identify its priorities and allocate resources accordingly. CDRPs were subject to a significant change agenda and the Home Office had recently introduced the "Six Hallmarks of Effective Partnerships" which outlined how CDRPs should operate.

Mr Petford informed Members that a Policy Group acted above the Strategy Group; this consisted only of the 6 statutory partners and met twice a year. The main target of the SMP was to reduce crime, and this was being achieved; there had been a 10.1% reduction in the last quarter. Mr Petford was concerned about the information currently being received by the SMP Strategy Group as it was quite technical and included a lot of data but not enough information and analysis; he was working to change this. Mr Petford also felt that the statutory partners other than the police and Maidstone Borough Council needed to be more involved in the activities of the SMP. Finally, the Strategy Group was now meeting 6 times a year rather than 12, which made the meetings more productive. The overall structure of the SMP was being reviewed to ensure that it was as efficient and relevant as possible.

Mr Thompson explained that the police authority role on CDRPs was historically unclear as police authorities did not provide a direct public service. The role of the KPA on the SMP was therefore to consider the priorities and responsibilities of the SMP and evaluate how the police was contributing to the delivery of these. The KPA aimed to ensure that a co-ordinated approach was taken to community consultation between the police, KPA and the SMP; that the police's contribution to the information-sharing protocol effectively met the needs of the SMP; that the police, KPA and SMP planning processes were aligned and targets and priorities were not conflicting; and to monitor the police's contribution to the SMP to secure efficiency, effectiveness and value for money.

Ms Mookherjee stated that the key issues for the PCT on the SMP were alcohol, drugs, other substances, domestic violence and harm to the person. The PCT covered an area of six boroughs and was moving towards two organisations, separating the provider and commissioner roles. In the future, the PCT would have a less direct role in delivery, so communication to providers would need to be extremely clear to explain what services were required to deliver priorities.

Mrs Norley explained that each Local Children's Services Partnership (LCSP) had a police representative on its board who led on the "staying safe" priority, ensuring that local needs were addressed and all partners were working together to improve outcomes for children and young people. The LCSP Plans underpinned the statutory responsibilities of the SMP. The SMP allowed the LCSP to maximise partnership working and the data sharing protocol ensured that local, up-to-date information was available.

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Mr Silvester stated that the key aims of the KFRS were to reduce fires and road traffic collisions. It therefore ran a large education programme which reached 9,347 students a year in 156 sessions. Each education key stage was targeted, starting with basic information and ending with initiatives targeting young drivers for example "Grow Up, Slow Down" and "Know the Limits". "Operation Carmageddon" brought a crash scenario outside a nightclub and engaged with people outside of the nightclub to show them the effects of a collision on people involved. The KFRS brought to the partnership resources and funding that were not available elsewhere, and it worked with a number of the key partners to assist them to achieve the partnership's aims. The KFRS had a youth diversion group which would this year start targeting hotspots for youth offending; this would particularly work to assist rural parishes. It was also involved in a number of youth groups such as MAYDAG (Multi-Agency Youth Development Action Group) and the Power Project.

Chief Inspector Pascoe assured Members that the SMP was not complacent about improving crime figures and partners asked many probing questions to ensure consistent improvements were made. Both the police and the SMP had their performance measured against "most similar" forces and CDRPs, which helped to identify any issues. The NIM required a strategic assessment to be carried out each year and the best quality information possible was required to inform this; Chief Inspector Pascoe would be seeking more information this year to further improve the quality of the strategic assessment. The CSU was a strong driver for the future working of the SMP and for finding long-term solutions. Kent Police had been successful in bidding to take part in the "Tackling Knives Action Programme", and one of the reasons for this success was the fact that the SMP signed off the police plan. The SMP was looking at the possibility of establishing task and finish groups to tackle specific issues rather than having standing delivery groups.

The Committee then discussed a number of issues:

Community Engagement

The Chairman highlighted concerns with regard to Member involvement with the SMP and suggested that more information, for example minutes of meetings, needed to be made available to Members. Mr Petford explained that in terms of Member involvement, the Cabinet Member for Community Services sat on the SMP Strategy and Policy groups, whilst a Kent County Council Member also attended. Of other CDRPs in Kent, three were chaired by Members whilst 9 had officer chairmen; of these 9, 3 were co-chaired, so Maidstone was not unusual in this respect. Mr Petford was aware of Member concern over information from the SMP and a website was to be launched soon which would make information easily available. MBC's Head of Communications was the Partnership's communications officer.

[Councillor Mrs Parvin in the chair for the remainder of the meeting]

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A Councillor asked how the SMP met its statutory responsibility to engage with communities. Chief Inspector Pascoe stated that engaging with the community was the SMP's biggest challenge. PACTs (Partners and Communities Together) were one way in which the police tried to encourage the community to come forward with any issues, and Councillors were encouraged to inform him of any issues in their wards. The police would be coming to speak to the Full Council later in the year to consult on their priorities.

Mr Sangha asked the partners how adequately they considered the SMP to be resourced to ensure effective delivery of consistent messages. Mr Petford stated that some interesting initiatives were being developed, for example the use of leaflets targeting areas at a ward and sub-ward level. The Committee requested examples of these leaflets.

A Councillor highlighted the need for information to be provided in plain English, and Mr Petford agreed that it was vital to ensure that the right communication was made at the right level. This included informal communication within communities being passed on to all the relevant agencies via Councillors to ensure that the right issues were being addressed.

Partnership Working and Information Sharing

A Member stated that little information was received from KFRS. Mr Silvester explained that KFRS supplied data to the SMP and confirmed that this could be made available to Members if required.

With regard to co-operation between the police and PCT, Ms Mookherjee explained that the two organisations were working together to share data and to ensure that data was collated in a way that was useful to both. They also worked together on the "Urban Blue" bus initiative to tackle health and crime issues in the night-time economy.

A Councillor asked whether a Tasking and Coordination Group was in place and Chief Inspector Pascoe confirmed that the Strategy Group took on this role. In response to a further question, Chief Supt. Hope explained that the SMP had a 3-year plan that was revised each year. MBC's Community Safety Co-ordinator kept a timetable monitoring when decisions needed to be reviewed to ensure that this was carried out.

Funding

In response to queries about funding, Mr Petford explained that the SMP received the following funding: Safer Stronger Communities Fund - £170,000; Basic Command Unit Fund - £68,000; Community Chest - £42,500; Performance Reward Grant 2008-2010 - £50,000 had been received so far; Kent Police - £20,000; MBC - £20,000; KFRS - £2,500; and Kent Police Authority - £5,000. He stated that MBC's contribution to the SMP was approved through the budget setting process and decisions on how to spend that money were made by the SMP Strategy Group. The Committee requested a copy of the SMP accounts.

A Councillor requested assurance that the delivery of the SMP priorities would not be affected by the budget savings that public sector organisations needed to achieve. Chief Supt. Hope confirmed that the 2009-10 budget was secure, however there was a lack of clarity around the 2010-11 budget both in terms of funding through the Kent Partnership and Government, and individual partner budgets. The SMP's strategy was to seek as much resource as possible and to bid for "top up" funding where possible. Mr Petford stated that the direct funding from individual partners was not as important as the need to coordinate spending and working amongst partners to maximise all available resources.

Domestic Violence

Chief Supt. Hope gave an example of the importance of partnership working in tackling crime and ASB. He explained that in an incident of domestic violence, the police would be required to deal with the offender, and as drugs or alcohol were often involved, health services would also have a role. With regard to alcohol, the Council had a role in terms of licensing. If children were in the household, social services would need to be involved, along with education. Voluntary sector services may also be required to support the victim. Additionally, the probation service would then have a key role in terms of reducing re-offending and re-victimisation.

Mr Sangha noted that in the SMP plan, for those issues where the major partners were leading, performance was improving; however performance was not improving at the same rate for tackling domestic violence. Mr Petford explained that it often took a long time to see results from initiatives to tackle such issues; however the SMP had helped to fund a domestic violence officer in the court and was looking at performance measures to ensure that this achieved results. Ms Mookherjee highlighted that incidences of domestic violence were under-reported nationally, and so while domestic violence was worrying, the reporting of incidences was positive as it meant action could be taken. Mr Petford also stated that various new measures were being brought in to help courts to tackle the issue.

Chief Supt. Hope highlighted that nearly one quarter of violence in the borough was domestic violence and so this was a key issue for the Partnership. One of the main triggers for domestic abuse was concerns about money, and the construction industry had been one of the hardest hit in the recession. Maidstone had a higher than average proportion of construction-related jobs, and therefore the borough was likely to be harder hit than many by the recession. Using this kind of data enabled the SMP to keep track of issues in the borough and ensured that resources were appropriately allocated.

A Councillor queried the role of education and Mrs Norley explained that there was a new initiative in Maidstone working with the women's support service to deliver training for teachers in schools and staff in children's centres, along with representatives working in homes, to allow them to

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recognise signs of domestic violence. There was also the CAF (Common Assessment Framework) system whereby anyone in a school with a concern about a family could complete a CAF form that was then submitted to a "single point of access" meeting. At this meeting all agencies could share information about the family to ensure that concerns were picked up. The CAF system identified a lead professional who co-ordinated the work of all agencies and provided a single point of contact for the family.

A Councillor referred to the recent "Baby P" case and Mrs Norley stated that Single Point of Access meetings aimed to ensure all agencies worked together so that issues were not missed. In the future there would be a shared database for all children, and all of the professionals involved with any family would be flagged up. Therefore if there was a lot of activity in relation to one family, that would trigger a different review of that family.

Other

A Councillor highlighted that Maidstone had the worst road safety record in Kent and suggested that the SMP had a greater role to play in addressing this. Mr Silvester stated that there were several bodies already working together to address road safety, however if there was an issue that could best be addressed by the SMP partners, proposals could be brought to the strategy group. Chief Supt. Hope agreed that road safety was a concern however it was not part of the SMP's remit and it was not funded to tackle the issue. Mr Petford highlighted that road safety would be better dealt with by other agencies, but when issues of ASB or crime were leading to road safety issues, that was when the SMP could become involved.

A Councillor suggested that it would be useful for the Licensing Committee to receive certain crime information from the SMP to assist it when it reviewed its policy with regard to reducing crime and disorder. Mr Petford agreed that it would be useful for the Licensing staff to speak with the Community Safety staff to consider how best to equip the Licensing Committee with the information it needed.

The Chairman thanked the partners for their attendance.

The Committee then discussed the key issues arising from the meeting and agreed that a communications plan was required for the SMP and Member involvement in the SMP needed to be improved. Members also asked for a timescale for the review of the SMP plan with a view to potentially looking at this review when it arose. It was agreed that numerical data from all partners was required to help to inform the future work programme of the Committee, along with information on who collated this information for the SMP. A Councillor also noted that it would be useful to find out which districts the SMP was compared to as this comparison could be useful information. Finally, it was noted that a full membership list of the SMP was available and the Acting Overview and Scrutiny Manager was requested to forward this to the Committee for information.

Resolved: That

- a) Copies of the SMP accounts, examples of SMP communications leaflets and a timescale for the review of the SMP plan be forwarded to the Committee;
- b) The Licensing Department be recommended to speak with the Community Safety department to identify how best to equip the Licensing Committee with information to fulfil its role;
- c) The SMP be recommended to produce a full communications plan to be considered by the Committee at a later date;
- d) Involvement of elected Members in the SMP be improved;
- e) Data provided to the SMP by the statutory partners also be made available to the Committee;
- f) The Committee be provided with contact details for the officer responsible for collating data for the SMP; and
- g) Information on the "most similar" districts used for performance comparison by the SMP, plus a full membership list of the SMP, be provided to the Committee.

56. Duration of the Meeting.

6:00 p.m. to 8:15 p.m.