

MAIDSTONE BOROUGH COUNCIL

**MINUTES OF THE COMMUNITIES OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY
COMMITTEE MEETING HELD ON TUESDAY 13 SEPTEMBER
2011**

PRESENT: Councillor Mrs Blackmore (Chairman)
Councillors Field, FitzGerald, Mrs Joy, Paterson,
Mrs Stockell and Yates

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

That all items be web-cast.

57. Apologies.

Apologies were received from Councillors Ash and D Mortimer and from Martin Adams, Chairman of the Safer Maidstone Partnership.

58. Notification of Substitute Members.

Councillor Joy substituted for Councillor D Mortimer.

59. Notification of Visiting Members.

There were no Visiting Members.

60. Disclosures by Members and Officers:

Councillor Stockell and Councillor Fitzgerald declared an interest in Item 8 on the Agenda, Update New Operational Policing Model and the revised priorities of the Safer Maidstone Partnerships, as a Member of the Kent Police Authority and Patron of the Domestic Violence Forum respectively.

61. 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

62. Minutes of the Meeting Held on 9 August 2011

Resolved: That the minutes of the meeting held on 9 August 2011 be agreed as a correct record of the meeting and duly signed by the Chairman.

63. Update: New Operational Policing Model and the revised priorities of the Safer Maidstone Partnership

The Chairman welcomed to the meeting Chief Inspector Steve Griffiths, Borough Commander for Maidstone, Barry Weeks, Manager of the Central Kent Youth Offending Team, Charlie Beaumont, Effective Practice & Performance Manager Kent Youth Offending Service and Niki Luscombe, Chief Executive (Interim) Women's Support Services. The Chairman thanked John Littlemore, Head of Housing and Community Services and Zena Cooke, Director of Regeneration and Communities for attending at short notice in place of Martin Adams, Chairman of the Safer Maidstone Partnership.

Chief Inspector, Steve Griffiths was invited to give a presentation on the new Kent Policing Model. He focused on what this would mean for Maidstone and explained the most recent Crime performance statistics for Maidstone. The Officer explained that the new policing model would increase the number of neighbourhood policing staff at all levels. There would be an increase in leadership and there would be an increase in Response and Crime Investigation Officers with numbers still to be ratified:

- Inspectors – 2 to 5
- Sergeants – 5 to 14
- Constables – 21 to 80
- PCSO's – 22.5 to 30 (to be confirmed)

He explained that Maidstone would be split into 3 Districts, Town Centre, West division, and East division. The Town Centre would have two Inspectors and the other two divisions would have one Inspector each. Chief Inspector Griffiths informed Members that his role in charge of the Community Safety Unit would grow as they would be taking on Offender Management as a new area of responsibility.

The latest Crime Performance Statistics showed an overall 1.6% reduction in crime which was 65 offences less than the same period the previous year. Vehicle Crime and Criminal Damage offences were down but Burglary, Theft and Violent Crime was up. The Officer highlighted that overall Maidstone was 1st in the County for detection rates with a reduction of 1.6% or 65 crimes overall but there were areas that had seen a rise within these figures. Burglary had had a slight increase of 2 offences (1.4%). The Officer explained that in the Town Centre there had been a reduction of 130 crimes compared with the same period last year. The increase in Burglary and Theft was linked to a shift to agricultural and rural areas where lead, copper, oil and abandoned houses were being targeted with the price of lead and scrap metal rising. The North Downs, a large geographical area with country lanes was cited as a problem area but Members were assured that a team had been deployed to deal with the problems in the past week.

The Committee questioned the tactics employed to deal with these types of crime. The Officer explained that they were working with neighbouring authorities as there was no scrap metal dealer in Maidstone, the nearest was in Aylesford. He explained that Aylesford fell within the new West Kent Division which Maidstone formed part of. CCTV was said to be one of

the most effective deterrents to criminals and Auto Number Plate Recognition cameras had aided the arrest of offenders caught in Boxley who were arrested for a number of crimes in the Rural area.

An area of crime that had fallen was Vehicle crime with a reduction of 10.3%, the government scrappage scheme resulting in better vehicles on the road was highlighted as a contributing factor in reducing this type of crime.

Chief Inspector Steve Griffiths informed the Committee that since 2006 there had been a 27% decline in violent crime but it had risen by 1.6 % (13 offences) compared with the same period the previous year. The Officer linked this type of crime firstly to the Nigh time Economy explaining that there had been an increase of 25% more people coming to Maidstone in the past year which meant that in this context the figure could be seen as positive. The second area addressed in relation to Violent Crime was Domestic Violence. It was explained that an increase in reported cases of Domestic Violence was extremely positive.

Anti Social Behaviour (ASB) was discussed and broken down into four measured performance areas, Action Taken, Follow Up, Treatment and Overall Service. Overall Maidstone were 3rd in the County in dealing with Anti Social Behaviour. Members were informed that Month on Month this year the reported cases of ASB had reduced with -9.4% in May, -20% in June and -18% in July. Members considered ASB issue in their own Wards and the effect of the reduction of Community Centres for young people in many areas. Mr Griffiths informed the Committee that there had been a 21% reduction in ASB in Shepway North and the future would be about Communities coming together on a Voluntary Basis in a manner similar to the Government's 'Big Society'. He spoke of successes in dealing with ASB on the Isle of Sheppey where boxing and running clubs were proving effective methods for reducing this type of crime. Members congratulated the Officer on the achievements of the police, particularly in a time of recession.

Members questioned the funding of Police Community Support Officers (PCSOs) and whether they were funded outside the force. The Officer explained that they were looking to increase numbers by 30 but there would be no growth in this area. The increase in numbers would be a result of movement within the County and redistribution of Officer Resource from other areas. The Officer confirmed that there were 3 part funded posts but the funding had been withdrawn. He praised the work of the PCSOs and told Members that he saw them as a front facing link to the police in Districts and Parishes. The support they were able to give during the disturbances in London and across the Country was noted.

Members questioned whether there would be an increase in foot patrols as a result of the new policing model. It was felt that in areas such as Parkwood and in older style Estates this had proved a very successful policing method. Mr Griffiths explained that foot patrols restricted the ability to redeploy Officers quickly which was a priority but in terms of public engagement and crime reduction it was a proven method.

The Committee considered the pleasing statistics that had been provided and the notable reduction in crime across the board but were concerned that this could be as a result of a change in the way crime was reported. They questioned why, if crime was falling, it was necessary to increase the number of Officers. The Chief Inspector explained that the way in which crime was reported by the Home Office had changed in the past and would change again. He told Members that the increase in Police Officers was the result of 'intelligent deployment' and existing Officers were being moved from the back office to the street. He felt that the police could not afford to be complacent about the figures as they were unaware what challenges were ahead.

Barry Weeks, Manager of the Central Kent Youth Offending Team and Charlie Beaumont, Effective Practice & Performance Manager Kent Youth Offending Service joined the discussion offering the perspective of the Youth Offending Services (YOS) and the challenges faced in this area. Mr Beaumont explained that the YOS was part of a multi agency arrangement but that all services were under pressure making particular reference to educational services. Members were informed that the average reading age of a young person was 7 years. Mr Weeks described a pilot scheme in Thanet and Swale that was bringing together community partners with a coordinated approach for information sharing and the pooling of resources. Historically this happened within the YOS with Housing and the Probation Services but it had lacked a co-ordination.

Mr Beaumont praised the sensible policing strategy in place that diverted young people from entering the 'system', hailing it as a brave policy adopted by Kent Police. Mr Beaumont informed the Committee that there had been a small increase in the re-offending rate but that re-offending rates in Maidstone were better than the national average. He referenced community budgets and resources and the need to focus on families showing signs of risk and parents with substance misuse issues to help break the cycles of deprivation that could result in young people entering the youth justice system.

Mr Beaumont highlighted the restorative justice work done to engage with victims. Members were informed that there were six victim liaison officers giving victims the opportunity to engage at a distance or they could become involved in the mediation process. The value of the restorative process was emphasised and the Committee were told that research showed that the more violent the offence the more effective restorative justice could be. Members questioned the public awareness of restorative justice. Mr Weeks explained that people were aware of the process and there were some cases that were more publicly visible than others. Whenever there was a statutory involvement with a young offender the YOS would get in touch with all victims of the crime and engage them in the restorative process, after first establishing the outcome the victim wanted. Mr Weeks highlighted a case where a victim of rape had driven the restorative process but it was a confidential process in order to protect the victim. Members felt that restorative justice could be an effective method of dealing with low level crime in communities such as Parkwood,

building bridges in the community and giving young people an awareness of the consequences of criminal behaviour.

Members considered the gender profile in the statistics provided, noting the fall in young women age 14-15 entering the system but observed there was no similar decline with young men. The Committee sought to establish if there was a difference in the trajectory in young men. Mr Beaumont told Members that there was still an enormous amount to learn in this area. From his experience when he began working in this field in the 1970s there were very few women in the system, they would be taken home for their parents to deal with. He observed that those young women remaining in the system tended to be more difficult to engage with than young men, he also attributed early cases of self harm and substance misuse with women. He felt that this was an area where more needed to be done to engage with young women to gain a greater understanding of them, concluding that society remained to have a greater tolerance for young women.

The Chairman invited Niki Luscombe, Chief Executive (Interim) from Women's Support Services (WSS) to join the discussion asking the pertinent question of how many troubled young people could have seen and been affected by Domestic Violence. Ms Luscombe explained that with 1 in 4 women and 1 in 6 men this was very likely to be a factor as it was estimated that 90% of children witnessed Domestic Violence. She agreed that early intervention was the key. Due to the lack of funding available WSS were only able to deal with high Risk cases but they wanted to work with medium risk couples. She also explained that WSS had an advocate working with them from the gypsy/traveller community which was proving to be the key to working with different communities.

The Committee were informed that through fund raising and sourcing grants available, WSS were able to currently offer a 9-5 helpline office and an out of office service at the Police Station on Saturday and Sundays. WSS had 75% success rates which meant that victims were not returning to abusive relationships. Members asked whether child psychologists were involved in the model used by WSS, such as part of children and mother's groups. Ms Luscombe explained that it was not part of the current model but they were looking at ways in which they could improve their service and particularly recognised the need to work with families.

Ms Luscombe explained that WSS has a £166,000 funding shortfall in funding through spending cuts. She spoke of the laborious tendering process involved in applying for sources of funding which took vital resources away from helping victims. She felt a holistic approach was needed in these areas with organisations working together.

The Committee expressed their surprise in relation to the figures given by Chief Inspector Steve Griffiths that cases of Violent Crime which reflected the cases of Domestic Violence reported were not higher and they needed to rise before they could go down. Members questioned the positive effect that the new policing model would have on Domestic Violence. Mr Griffith confirmed that Domestic Violence was a high priority for the Police

as well as for the Council and the Safer Maidstone Partnership (SMP). He told the Committee that WSS were vital in ensuring that victims reported the crime, although this was usually, on average, after 35 offences against them had been committed. John Littlemore, Head of Housing and Community Services, confirmed that the SMP were in support of the 'One Stop Shop' and funding had recently been given, by the SMP, to enable this to happen. Members were also informed that Maidstone Borough Council employed a dedicated Domestic Violence Officer as part of the Housing team. The Officer told the Committee that they had been taking a holistic approach in this area and had responded to the needs of WSS by helping them complete the paperwork to aid their funding applications. The Committee felt that this was a particular area that the Council should be helping with, offering assistance, with funding bids and tendering processes in order to free up the time of advocates. Ms Luscombe also highlighted that there was a lack of sophisticated information available on clients and intelligent data from other agencies would help WSS map out a client's needs.

It was felt that a continued dialogue to be had on the wide ranging topics discussed and hoped that this could continue. The Chairman thanked all for attending.

Resolved: That a continued dialogue should be maintained with Women's Support Services, the Youth Offending Service, the Police Authority and the Safer Maidstone Partnership to enable productive discussion and support to continue between the organisations present and the Committee.

64. Information: Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnership Scrutiny Protocols

The Committee noted the protocols.

65. Duration of Meeting

6.30 p.m. to 9.02 p.m.