

MAIDSTONE BOROUGH COUNCIL

OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON THURSDAY 6 OCTOBER 2022

Attendees:

Committee Members:	Councillors English (Chairman), Cannon, Mrs Blackmore, Cleator, Conyard, Garten, Jeffery, Knatchbull, McKenna, T Wilkinson, Brindle and Springett
Visiting Members:	Councillor Lottie Parfitt-Reid, Lead Member for Communities and Engagement

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were received from Councillor Brice, Hastie and Hinder.

2. NOTIFICATION OF SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS

Councillor Brindle was in attendance as Substitute for Councillor Brice.

Councillor Springett was in attendance as Substitute for Councillor Hinder.

3. URGENT ITEMS

There were no urgent items.

4. NOTIFICATION OF VISITING MEMBERS

Councillor Parfitt-Reid, Lead Member for Communities and Engagement was in attendance as a Visiting Member for Item 11 – Briefing on Safety in the Town Centre.

5. DISCLOSURES BY MEMBERS AND OFFICERS

There were no disclosures by Members and Officers.

6. DISCLOSURES OF LOBBYING

There were no disclosures of lobbying.

7. EXEMPT ITEMS

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

8. PRESENTATION OF PETITIONS

There were no petitions.

9. QUESTION AND ANSWER SESSION FROM LOCAL RESIDENTS

There were no questions from Local Residents.

10. QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS TO THE CHAIRMAN

There were no questions from Members to the Chairman.

11. MEMBER BRIEFING ON SAFETY IN THE TOWN CENTRE

The officers in attendance were formally introduced:

- Martyn Jeynes, Community and Strategic Partnerships Manager (Maidstone Borough Council)
- Ellen Shaw, Youth Hub Delivery Manager Maidstone (Kent County Council)
- Andrew Stringer, Partnership Sergeant, Maidstone, Community Safety Partnership (Kent Police)

In commencing the briefing, the Community and Strategic Partnerships Manager outlined the geographical area covered by the Town Centre Task Force (TCTF), known as the 'local super output area' for local crime. The TCTF's focus was to protecting people from harm, and improve the culture associated with the day and night-time economies of the Town Centre.

The Partnership Sergeant, Maidstone Community Safety Partnership (Kent Police) outlined the Task Force's membership, which included five police officers, and partner associations. The OSARA problem-solving technique was explained, with a focus on early engagement and detailed analysis of any problems with the TCTF's partners to remove a contributing factor to the criminality.

The Youth Hub Delivery Manager Maidstone (Kent County Council) outlined the contextual safeguarding approach, which focused on understanding young people's experienced of significant harm beyond their families. A monthly district contextual safeguarding meeting took place between the TCTF's partners which involved location assessments, which aimed to create safe environments for young people from the places and spaces available.

A key element would be providing contextual safeguarding training to non-traditional partners, helping them to better understand young people and identify signs of exploitation, amongst other things. Statistically, young people that had experienced trauma were more likely to undertake risk-taking behaviour and require NHS services as a result. The use of the OSARA and contextual safeguarding techniques collectively increased the knowledge available to synergise the work between the partner organisations.

The three work strands of the TCTF were briefly outlined to include implementation and creation, pursue and changing/challenging behaviour, and the engagement and legacy aspect.

The Partnership Sergeant, Maidstone Community Safety Partnership (Kent Police) stated that the individuals presenting the most challenging behaviours were identified with the partnership organisations. The OSARA technique was applied, with successful examples of the evidence-based partnership working to displace

the behaviour included Brenchley Gardens and a shop at the north end of Week Street.

The Community and Strategic Partnerships Manager explained that from the Shepway Task Force's creation, whilst inappropriate behaviour could be addressed, further resources were needed to prevent its reoccurrence. As such, a successful application was made to the Kent and Medway Violence Reduction Unit for a youth hub in Maidstone Mall. The '326' youth hub would be an easily accessible space, in a busy part of the town centre, with free workshops for young people to attend and would be open on weekends. The opening hours of 3-6 p.m. on weekdays would provide a safe space during the 'lost hours' between the end of the school and working days.

With the support of the Kent Police and Crime Commissioner, the Council had been awarded £460k from the Safer Streets Fund Initiative. The funding's allocation was outlined, to include an office space for police officers in Brenchley Gardens, control tools such as Hollie Guard subscriptions, and by-stander training amongst other things.

In response to questions on the statistics provided within the agenda papers, the Community and Strategic Partnership Manager confirmed that these demonstrated a reduction in crime. However, as the statistics preceded the creation of the Town Centre Task Force (TCTF), updated crime statistics would be made available at a later date. The increased reporting of stalking and harassment demonstrated a rise in reporting rather than necessarily an increase in the crime, as this and domestic abuse (DA) were often unreported crimes. The Covid-19 pandemic had increased the awareness of the need for everyone to tackle domestic abuse and of the support available; the Council had since employed a Domestic Abuse and Safeguarding Officer that leads the local DA forum. The Protection against Stalking Charity was a forum member and the Hollie Guard subscriptions attained through the Safer Streets Funding would be given to individuals at low and/or medium risk of stalking and harassment, to provide additional support.

A targeted DA campaign within a residential area local to the high street was ongoing, whilst the TCTF focused on addressing crime within the joint commercial-residential areas within the town centre. This targeted approach reinforced the importance of intelligence-based partnership working.

During questioning, the number of incidents around Brenchley Gardens was raised. The Community and Strategic Partnerships Manager provided reassurance that whilst further verification was needed, current statistics encouragingly indicated that a reduction in crime and the reporting of crime at the site had dropped by 40%. Positive events at the site had included at least five music events across the Summer and the temporary placement of the Knife Angel as part of an educational programme. Six of the town centre's CCTV cameras were positioned on the site. It was acknowledged that CCTV provided significant evidence in solving crime, with the equipment continually monitored and a weekly performance report provided.

The support provided to address the 'lost hours' was also questioned. The Youth Hub Delivery Manager Maidstone (Kent County Council) confirmed that funding had been provided from various sources including the 'My Place Programme', the Violence Reduction Unit and Kent County Council's 'Reconnect Programme'. These

would provide activities and course for young people, such as behavioural therapy, and support workshops at the '326' youth hub. The Community and Strategic Partnerships Manager confirmed that the Council had lobbied for longer funding timescales to increase the support's sustainability.

In response to questions on the Task Force and the ongoing work to reduce crime, the Community and Strategic Partnerships Manager referenced the Council's Community Safety Plan, including the aims to improve the town centre narrative and supporting young people. The Shepway Task Force had been recognised as good practice as part of the Neighbourhood Policing Review and carried out more 'stop and searches' than by any other Kent policing body due to its intelligence led, rather than randomised, approach. The Task Force's resources and partners demonstrated the synergy needed to address crime. Its mobility was demonstrated by its use in various areas across the borough, which contained two of the four Task Forces within Kent County. To continue supporting this approach, Members were asked to report any crimes witnessed.

Several Members of the Committee felt that more positive communications on the TCTF's good performance were needed, particularly given how incidents of criminality were reported more quickly, widely, and sometimes inaccurately through social media channels. In response, the Community and Strategic Partnerships Manager referenced the publicly available 'My Community Voice' app, which provided live updates on operations within a local area. Further, a significant portion of the Safer Streets Funding would provide for a positive communications campaign, focusing on having a safe, enjoyable time in the town centre. The Autumn 2022 issue of the Council's Borough Insight Magazine would contain a piece on the TCTF. The Director of Strategy, Insight and Governance confirmed that the Council was working with its partners as part of the (national) Youth Investment Fund, to identify a site within the Borough that could be improved to provide additional services and skills to young people. An update would be given when available.

The Committee thanked the Officers for the briefing provided, with requests made for the following information: the presentation provided as part of the briefing, strategic assessment statistics, the crime rate statistics for Brenchley Gardens within the Town Centre Task Force Horizon Pack (August 2022) and an update October 2022 version of the pack.

In progressing the review, Members were asked to send any additional questions to the Democratic Services Officer, Chairman and Vice-Chair.

RESOLVED: That the briefing provided be noted, and the review continued at the 18 October 2022 Meeting of the Committee.

12. DURATION OF MEETING

7.30 p.m. to 9.32 p.m.