

Cllr Derek Mortimer
Chair, Communities Housing & Environment
Committee S/A Crime & Disorder Committee
Maidstone Borough Council
Maidstone House
Maidstone
ME15 6JQ

27 August 2019



**COUNCILLOR CALL FOR ACTION: THE SAFETY OF MAIDSTONE'S STREETS
SECTION 19, POLICE & JUSTICE ACT 2006**

Pursuant to the above, and to Rule 4 of the Maidstone Crime & Disorder Partnership Reduction Procedure Rules, I write to request that we meet as the Council's Crime & Disorder Committee shortly to discuss the safety of the Borough's streets.

You will no doubt be aware of a number of alarming events in the past few days: -

- The unlawful killing of a young person in the early hours of Sunday 25 August 2019, together with the wounding of four others, occurring immediately outside the Town Hall;
- The daylight mugging of an elderly man at 08:45hrs on Saturday 24 August 2019, involving the use of an as yet undisclosed form of weapon, by the cash machine at the Texaco garage at the start of the Ashford Road;
- A serious assault just after 08:00hrs on Friday 23 August 2019, described in a statement by Kent Police as one in which "a man suffered an injury consistent with a stabbing" requiring him to be airlifted to a London hospital, occurring on Station Approach, Headcorn.

Unfortunately, these are from isolated incidents and appear to be part of an increasingly worrying trend that some of us have been highlighting for sometime.

There are a number of particular matters to which I would like the committee to attend under this broad heading.

Kent Police

Firstly, I would like to hear from Kent Police. I would like to hear whether it is now accepted that there is more violent crime & public disorder et cetera on our streets. Moreover, I would like to hear what additional measures and resources are being put in place to address the situation.

I would like Kent Police to explain, and where necessary for the Committee to make statutory recommendations to the Chief Constable on, any proposals for: -

- Increases in Police numbers and activity specifically on our streets here in Maidstone;
- Increased use of Police powers, including for example use of its dispersal power¹ but more importantly use of its 'stop and search' powers².

I am concerned that Kent Police appear to lag behind the Metropolitan Police and British Transport Police in the effective use of the Section 60 'stop and search' power, and that the Home Secretary's announcement on 11 August 2019 lifting all the restrictions on that power might not be utilised by this county's force as robustly as it ought to be.

I am very mindful that Police Officers themselves are at extreme risk in their duties, but I believe this power could have been effective had the risk in our High Street on Saturday night & Sunday morning been recognised.

Licensing Matters

Secondly, I would like consideration given to the adequacy of the Council's existing licensing arrangements in terms of ensuring safety at establishments & events continuing well beyond traditional public house closing times.

Whilst I appreciate the Police investigation into the events of Saturday night & Sunday morning is ongoing, there is significant public concern around one particular licensed establishment. They had booked an act (a "grime rap artist") whom a simple *Google* search could have identified as likely to result in a higher-risk event. Persons photographed appearing on the stage at the event bore a strong resemblance to persons later filmed in the subsequent affray. Claims by that establishment to have searched all guests upon entry have been widely disputed on social media by those people in attendance who state that they were not searched and that they saw nobody else searched. I should state that I am writing to the Council's licensing officers (and the Police) under separate cover with fuller details and with copies of the various images I have been passed.

Aside from the particular events of Saturday night & Sunday morning, there is wider concern as to late night violence around the High Street and around the safety of such late-night establishments. KMTV yesterday morning carried an interview with the landlord of the 'Old House at Home' in Pudding Lane who is evidently experienced in managing conventional alcohol-related issues. He was nevertheless concerned to the point that he would not let his own eighteen-year-old daughter visit the High Street late at night. It would be foolish to overlook this insight.

Kent County Council

Thirdly, I would be interested in hearing from KCC as to their own activities and provision in tackling street violence and other youth crime. I understand for example that KCC have a 'Select Committee' on *Knife Crime in Kent* that is due to report shortly.

MBC's Own Provisions

Fourthly, I would like the Committee to look into the effectiveness of our own arrangements for combatting crime & disorder.

¹ Section 35, Anti-Social Behaviour, Crime and Policing Act 2014

² Section 60, Criminal Justice & Public Order Act 1994.

The bulk of the Council's efforts in terms of expenditure appear to be in respect of Closed-Circuit Television ("CCTV") cameras. I would be interested in understanding the effectiveness of these arrangements in respect of violence on the High Street et cetera. Has the system been able to provide the Police with good clean images? Does it provide anything that the Police might not otherwise be able to obtain from the cameras maintained by High Street businesses? There is the possibility, though I am personally open-minded on the issue, that the money so deployed might be better spent providing "boots on the ground".

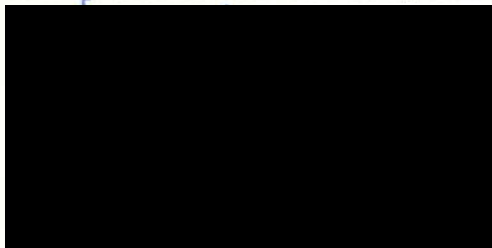
There is then the matter of the Council's use of its powers under the Anti-Social Behaviour, Crime & Policing Act 2014. The Committee should ask whether the current Public Spaces Protection Order ("PSPO")³ is effective. It is clear to me that there remains a culture of 'anything goes' on our streets and open spaces around the town centre. It cannot be conducive to public safety & comfort for so many people to sit around places like Brenchley Gardens, or sometimes in Jubilee Square outside the Town Hall, drinking cans and smoking cannabis all day. Similarly, it cannot be conducive to crime reduction for persons being convicted in the Magistrates' Court of assorted crimes, from shop-lifting to assault to other public order offences, to immediately reappear loitering around Week Street or Brenchley Gardens with no apparent purpose. Whilst the Sentencing Council itself remains sadly bereft of public accountability or scrutiny, powers exist by which the local Magistrates ("Criminal Behaviour Orders")⁴ or the Council itself ("Community Protection Notices")⁵ can ban these people returning to their old haunts for a period.

In my view, these powers are not being used to their full effect; the Committee should be making recommendations for a significant increase in their use, such as tightening the PSPO to ban all forms of public drinking in town centre locations beyond licensed premises.

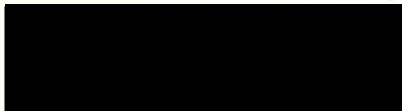
Conclusion

A number of us have for some time been vocal in warning that the level of violence and lawlessness on the streets of Maidstone has been steadily and continuously rising. We have been met in certain quarters with elements of denial and naivety bordering on a dogmatic refusal to grasp the true nature of Maidstone's criminal & anti-social elements and the need for firm action.

I believe recent events show that the time for such indulgent attitudes has now passed and that firm action is needed to stem the Borough of Maidstone's slow descent into barbarism.



Jonathan Purle
Conservative Councillor for Bridge Ward



³ Part 4, Ch.2, Anti-Social Behaviour, Crime and Policing Act 2014

⁴ Section 22, *Op.cit.*

⁵ Section 43, *Op.cit.*