

MAIDSTONE BOROUGH COUNCIL

OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE ACTING AS THE CRIME AND DISORDER COMMITTEE

MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON TUESDAY 20 DECEMBER 2022

Attendees:

Committee Members:	Councillors English (Chairman), Cannon, Brice, Cleator, Conyard, Garten, Hastie, Jeffery, Knatchbull, McKenna, T Wilkinson and Brindle
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59. **APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies were received from Councillors Hinder and McKenna.

60. **NOTIFICATION OF SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS**

Councillor Brindle was present as Substitute for Councillor Hinder.

61. **URGENT ITEMS**

The Chairman stated that there were two urgent updates to Item 12 – Safety Review – Internal Stakeholder Consultation, which were the Communications Team’s Communications and Engagement Plan and written evidence from Housing Associations operating within the Town Centre. The documents related to the Committee’s evidence collection process.

62. **NOTIFICATION OF VISITING MEMBERS**

There were no Visiting Members.

63. **DISCLOSURES BY MEMBERS AND OFFICERS**

In relation to Item 12 – Safety Review – Internal Stakeholder Consultation, Councillor Brice stated that she was a Council Representative to the One Maidstone BID Advisory Board.

64. **DISCLOSURES OF LOBBYING**

There were no disclosures of lobbying.

65. **EXEMPT ITEMS**

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

66. **MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 18 OCTOBER 2022**

RESOLVED: That the Minutes of the Meeting held on 18 October 2022 be approved as a correct record and signed, subject to the ‘TCTF’ being referred to as the ‘Town Centre Task Force’ in the first instance.

67. PRESENTATION OF PETITIONS

There were no petitions.

68. QUESTION AND ANSWER SESSION FOR LOCAL RESIDENTS

There were no questions from Local Residents.

69. QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS TO THE CHAIRMAN

There were no questions from Members to the Chairman.

70. SAFETY REVIEW - INTERNAL STAKEHOLDER CONSULTATION

The Democratic Services Officer introduced the report and highlighted the example questions contained within point 2.7 of the report. The review's timeline and the urgent updates provided were briefly outlined.

The attendees were as follows, with each attendee having briefly introduced themselves and their role at the Council:

- Julie Maddocks, Communications Manager
- Martyn Jeynes, Community and Strategic Partnerships Manager
- John Littlemore, Head of Housing and Regulatory Services

The attendees were asked for their views on the progress made to Town Centre Safety; the Head of Housing and Regulatory Services stated that public safety had been improved across the day-and-night-time economies. The requests made by the previous Communities, Housing and Environment Committee had been actioned in recognition of the previous concerns raised.

The Community and Strategic Partnerships Manager emphasised that the Town Centre Task Force (TCTF) had implemented fundamental actions to improve public safety but recognised that some of these may be long-term. The short-term actions, such as youth hub provision and increased communications were briefly outlined. Individuals were beginning to actively challenge against negative perceptions of the Town Centre.

The Communications Manager stated that Town Centre Safety had been a priority for their team across the past 12 months, with 16 press releases produced relating to Community Protection, Public Safety, Enforcement and Waste Crime. The 'Safer Streets' funding had enabled further advertising through posters and banners, with a radio campaign beginning on 23 December 2022. The Stay Connected Newsletters through the GovDelivery system and the Council's Borough Insight Magazine were outlined as additional methods to providing information to local residents. The communication with external stakeholders and partnership organisations had improved across the last year.

All attendees noted the difficulty in improving the Town Centre's reputation, but that progress was being made.

The Committee reiterated the need to ensure that the communications produced promoted the positive actions and achievements of the Council, particularly as

negative press often attracted greater attention, acting to outweigh the positive communications produced.

In response to questions, the Head of Housing and Regulatory Services stated that they would provide a written response to the Committee on the suitability of Licensing Officers attending the Town Centre Street Scene meetings; provided that the team were given sufficient notice, they could attend those meetings where appropriate. The liaison between the Council's Licensing and Community Safety Teams and Kent Police was excellent, with the teams co-located to assist in partnership working.

The Committee strongly expressed concern at violence and crime directed at women and young girls and the need to challenge inappropriate behaviour. In response, the Head of Housing and Regulatory Services referenced the long-term aspirations of the work currently being undertaken, such as educating young men and boys, in improving public safety.

The Community and Strategic Partnerships Manager stated that they and their colleagues had recently visited the Town Centre during a Friday evening, to directly engage with women and ask for them to complete a safety survey; cup covers were also distributed. In response to questions, it was stated that whilst it was difficult to numerically record incidents of spiking, due to its similarity with other incidents such as excessive drinking and there sometimes being a reluctance to report the crime due to its traumatic nature, there was not a significant spiking problem within Maidstone. The positive work conducted by Urban Blue and Street Pastors was mentioned.

The specifics of the survey undertaken in preparation for the current Community Safety Partnership had been shared with Kent Police, and the survey results, combined with the data held on police crime statistics, was used to assist the Council in securing the Safer Streets Funding. The Community and Strategic Partnerships Manager would follow-up with Kent Police on the feedback received, to provide further information to the Committee.

In response to further questions, the Community and Strategic Partnerships Manager stated that most young people did not live in the town centre and commuted from other local areas. The Maidstone Task Force based in Marden would be working with the British Transport Police in the new year to review young people's use of trains across the borough.

The success of Maidstone's policing had been demonstrated through those police officers' attendance in Snodland to address criminal activity in the area. Kent Police's ongoing Neighbourhood Policing Review was highlighted, with the Community and Strategic Partnerships Manager confident that the model implemented would work, as it was similar to that already implemented in Maidstone.

The attendees were questioned on the work being conducted within schools. The Community and Strategic Partnerships Manager stated that this was a challenge, but that work was progressing to include the provision of Active Bystander training in the new year. There were 40 youth workers, youth outreach officers and school staff delivering the previously mentioned Boys2Men training to challenge unacceptable behaviour. The importance of early intervention and education was re-emphasised.

Several Members of the Committee questioned the attendees on the actions taken by Housing Associations (HA) in relation to anti-social behaviour (ASB), following the urgent update provided. In response, the Community and Strategic Partnerships Manager outlined the good working relationship between the town centre HAs and the TCTF, with the HAs often attending the twice-weekly TCTF meetings to discuss individuals and locations of concern. During the Covid-19 pandemic an individual planning model was implemented to address five town centre buildings where inappropriate behaviour was taking place; three of the plans had since been closed due to the significant improvement shown, which included a marked reduction in ambulance attendance. The HA's management of its properties and tenants had improved, with an example given of how HAs assisted in identifying issues of domestic abuse, with the Council able to provide information on support services through its Domestic Abuse Co-ordinator. The Council's Domestic Abuse One-Stop Shops had also been publicised.

The Community and Strategic Partnerships Manager highlighted that whilst HAs possessed some powers to tackle ASB, their main power was their ability to end a tenancy. HAs would attempt to address ASB before ending a tenancy agreement was considered. The Head of Housing and Regulatory Services emphasised the importance of supporting tenants before eviction was considered, given the context of the legislative requirements, public sector duties and ensuring an understanding of the impacts associated with a tenancy's termination action. This was particularly important where the individual responsible for ASB was a victim of ASB themselves. The Housing Management sector had significantly improved its services over the past 30 years. For example, HAs and Local Authorities (LA) now exchanged good practice; this was facilitated in Maidstone through the Kent Housing Group.

The Head of Housing and Regulatory Services stated that the HAs contacted held between 50-200 units, with a written update on the exact units held to be provided outside of the meeting.

In response to Member concerns on out of area placements, the Head of Housing and Regulatory Services explained that other LAs had a statutory duty to inform the Council if they have placed an individual within the Maidstone Borough. It was not uncommon for the Council to become aware of the placement when an individual required support. There was no statutory power available to the Council to prevent in-area placements, but the Council took action where those properties fell below housing standards. The Council would persist in contacting the relevant LAs, to actively challenge against inappropriate placements. The Council could only advise the client on taking legal action against the placement, and clients did not often feel confident in doing so.

The attendees were asked for their views on the requests submitted by the External Stakeholders as outlined in Appendix 2 to the report. In response, the Community and Strategic Partnerships Manager stated that the requests reflected the actions included within the Council's Community Safety Plan and those being implemented in practice with the TCTF. Further details on the organisations represented on the Local Children's Partnership Group Forum and its meeting schedule were provided.

The Communications Manager stated that the Council used all communications channels available to promote the work undertaken. The importance of building

upon the established relationships with the Council's partner organisations was emphasised, with it stated that this was successful. During the evidence collection, the Committee expressed support for the actions undertaken.

The attendees thanked the Committee for its support and engagement as part of its review.

RESOLVED: That the Safety Review be contributed at the next available meeting of the Committee.

Note: Councillor Brice left the meeting at 8.22 p.m.

71. DURATION OF MEETING

7.15 p.m. to 8.38 p.m.

Note: The Committee adjourned between 8.22 p.m. to 8.27 p.m. for a short break.