

Safety in the Town Centre

March 2023



A review conducted by the Maidstone Borough Council Overview and Scrutiny Committee

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Introduction and Rationale

In July 2022, the Council's Overview and Scrutiny Committee (the Committee) agreed to review Safety and Enforcement, as a two-stage review to take place across the 2022/23 municipal year. In considering the proposed review topic, the Committee expressed that reviewing Safety in the Town Centre would better inform a future review into Council-wide enforcement.

Due to the Committee's ambitious work programme, the Committee agreed in December 2022 to formally separate the two reviews and focus initially on completing the safety aspect of the review, known as 'Safety in the Town Centre'. The Enforcement review has been scheduled for the 2023/24 municipal year.

This report outlines the review timeline and resulting recommendations produced by the Committee.

The aim of the review was to:

'Review existing [safety] measures to identify any required changes'.

Approach to the Review

As the review topic related to the Committee's function as the Council's Crime and Disorder Committee, the meetings have been held with the Committee acting as the Crime and Disorder Committee. The review has taken place mainly through verbal questioning, supported by written information within the agenda papers and when requested of external stakeholders.

Additional meetings were scheduled to facilitate the review, due to the topic scope and the range of evidence to be provided. The table on the next page outlines the meetings that took place, the respective attendees and evidence provided. Links to the information have been included for each meeting.

Meeting	Attendees	Evidence provided
6 Oct 2022 – Member Briefing	Community and Strategic Partnerships Manager (MBC) Youth Hub Delivery Manager Maidstone (KCC) Partnership Sergeant, Maidstone, Community Safety Partnership (Kent Police)	Community Safety Plan Extract Data extract from the Town Centre Strategy Data Pack Joint presentation from attendees, and Q&A session. Your Councillors - Maidstone Borough Council
18 Oct 2022	Community and Strategic Partnerships Manager (MBC) District Commander (Kent Police) Inspector (Kent Police) Youth Hub Delivery Manager Maidstone (KCC) Bid Manager (One Maidstone) Violence Reduction Unit Co-ordinator (Kent and Medway Violence Reduction Unit)	Themes from Member Briefing. Verbal Q&A Session with attendees. Your Councillors - Maidstone Borough Council
20 Dec 2022	Communications Manager (MBC) Community and Strategic Partnerships Manager (MBC) Head of Housing and Regulatory Services (MBC)	Written responses from: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 18 Oct attendees concerning future actions; • Housing Associations within the Town Centre. Safer Streets Communication Plan. Verbal Q&A Session with attendees. Your Councillors - Maidstone Borough Council
21 Feb 2023	Not applicable – Meeting to formulate recommendations	Summary of review evidence and committee sentiments, guidance note on recommendations. Your Councillors - Maidstone Borough Council

Recommended Actions and Intended Outcomes

During the review, the Committee expressed support for the actions being taken to improve town centre safety, through the Town Centre Task Force in of itself, and the general actions taken by the Council and its partner agencies.

The recommendations produced by the Committee focused on greater communications, member involvement and future actions, and these have been grouped into respective sections below.

The Committee's recommendations arising from the review will be directed to the **Lead Member for Communities and Public Engagement**. Where applicable, the Lead Officer for each action has been included.

Greater Communications

Overall Outcome: To enable the production of a greater number of positive communications on town centre safety.

The Committee felt that there should be greater communications to publicise the actions taken to improve safety in the town centre, in part as negative press could be inaccurate and often attracted greater public attention than positive communications.

Specific references were made to the below aspects throughout the review in outlining the topics that Council communications should be covering¹:

- The achievements of the Town Centre Task Force
- Partnership working
- Successful interventions
- Provision of Youth Services
- Contact details for partner organisations and council services, such as Domestic Abuse Support

To achieve this, the Committee has put forward the below recommendations:

1. To continue regular meetings with the Kent Police Press Office

Lead Officer: Communications Manager

2. To investigate the possibility of an Annual Community Safety Partnership Event, with all partners in attendance.

Lead Officer: Community and Strategic Partnerships Manager

3. To circulate the Communications Teams updated 'Communications Plan' to Members, to outline all elements of the communications works.

¹ Minutes of the Meetings held 6 & 18 October, 20 December 2022, see page 3 of this report for access links.

Lead Officer: Communications Manager

4. **To include information on the Overview and Scrutiny Committee's review within the next iteration of the Borough Insight Magazine.**

Lead Officer: Communications Manager

5. **That Kent Police be requested to:**
 - a. **Promote the multi-agency work of the Town Centre Task Force; and**
 - b. **Publicise their community engagement plans, to allow the Council to align its communications actions to this.**

Member Engagement

Overall Outcome: To provide improved support to Members.

During the review, the Committee and external attendees highlighted the role of Elected Members in reporting incidents of criminal activity, supporting the services provided and engaging with young people, and raising the work undertaken with their respective political groups.²

To further support Members in their role, the Committee has put forward the below recommendations:

6. **To encourage all Members to sign up to the 'My Community Voice' facility provided by Kent Police.**

The My Community Voice facility provides updates on live investigations within a pre-set area, such as a postcode area, to those signed up.

7. **To encourage all Members to sign up the 'Stay Connected' online newsletters produced by the Council.**

Lead Officer: Communications Manager

8. **To provide Members with the contact details for the various reporting mechanisms.**

Lead Officer: Head of Housing and Regulatory Services

9. **To facilitate a Member representative engaging with the KCC (Maidstone) Youth Forum.**

Lead Officer: Community and Strategic Partnerships Manager

² Minutes of the Meetings held 6 & 18 October 2022, see page 3 of this report for access links.

10. To provide Members and Officers with Bystander Training.

Bystander training is training on how to de-escalate difficult situations safely and is already being rolled out to others, such as youth workers and local schools.

Lead Officer: Community and Strategic Partnerships Manager

11. To encourage continued engagement from Members with Council activities, such as Member Briefings.

Future Actions

Overall Outcome: Ensure effective monitoring of any actions agreed and ensure that public feedback is considered.

In formulating its recommendations, the Committee highlighted the feedback they had received from residents on reporting safety concerns and the importance of ensuring that further information and feedback was provided on the matter following the review³.

To achieve this, the Committee has put forward the below recommendations:

12. That the questions contained within the annual survey on town centre safety be reviewed, to ensure that the questions contained can be used to conduct a benchmarking exercise.

Lead Officer: Community and Strategic Partnerships Manager and Head of Housing and Regulatory Services.

13. That a Member be appointed as a rapporteur to conduct a post-review evaluation.

³ Minutes of the Meeting held on 21 February 2023. See table on page 4 for access links.

Summary of Stakeholder Evidence

Internal Stakeholders

Julie Maddocks, Communications Manager

The Communications Manager contributed to the review through attendance at the 20 December 2022 Committee meeting and the provision of the Safer Streets Communication Plan.

At the meeting, the Committee questioned the Communications Manager for their views on the progress made to town centre safety, and the types of communications produced on the matter over the past 12 months. During the questioning, the importance of building upon the established relationships between the Council and its partner organisations was emphasised.

Martyn Jeynes, Community and Strategic Partnerships Manager

As the relevant Manager to the review, this officer contributed significantly to the review. The Community and Strategic Partnerships Manager attended three of the four meetings held on the topic, provided a member-briefing to the Committee (6 October 2022), and provided written information.

In response to questions from the Committee, the Community and Strategic Partnerships Manager provided a wide range of information relating to the Town Centre Task Force, various training initiatives, partnership working and the relationships between the Council and its partners.

The Community and Strategic Partnerships Manager also liaised with the Council's partner organisations on the review, assisting to facilitate their attendance at various meetings.

John Littlemore, Head of Housing and Regulatory Services

As the relevant Head of Service for the review topic, the Head of Housing and Regulatory Services attended the 20 December 2022 Committee Meeting. The Head of Housing and Regulatory Services answered questions relating to the improvements made to town centre safety, the long-term aspirations of the work being conducted, and the actions of housing providers and other local authorities placing individuals within the borough.

External Stakeholders

Ilsa Butler, Bid Manager (One Maidstone)

The One Maidstone Bid Manager attended the 18 October 2022 Committee Meeting and answered questions on the various actions being taken by One Maidstone to assist in improving town centre safety, the partnership working in place, such as One Maidstone's operation of the Council's CCTV equipment, and the Bid Term 2 Document's production. Written information was also provided for the Committee to consider at its 20 December 2022 meeting.

Ellen Shaw, Youth Hub Delivery Manager (Kent County Council)

The Youth Hub Delivery Manager attended the 6 October 2022 Committee Meeting and assisted in providing a member briefing to the Committee on the Town Centre Task Force.

The Youth Hub Delivery Manager also attended the 18 October 2022 Committee Meeting, and answered questions on the provision of youth services, such as the 326-youth hub, and the Maidstone Youth Forum. Written information was also provided for the Committee to consider at its 20 December 2022 meeting.

Emma Price, Violence Reduction Unit Co-Ordinator (Kent and Medway Violence Reduction Unit)

The Violence Reduction Unit Co-Ordinator attended the 18 October 2022 Committee Meeting and answered questions on the work undertaken by the Kent and Medway Violence Reduction Unit, the various training initiatives and educational programmes being provided and future activities for young people. Written information was also provided for the Committee to consider at its 20 December 2022 meeting.

Mark McLellan, District Commander (Kent Police)

The District Commander attended the 18 October 2022 Committee Meeting and answered questions on the actions being taken by Kent Police to improve safety in the town centre. A variety of examples were given, such as for specific events like the world cup, alongside partnership working. The Committee's wish for increased communications was noted.

Steve Kent, Inspector (Kent Police)

The Inspector attended the 18 October 2022 Committee Meeting, also answering questions on the actions being taken by Kent Police to improve safety in the town centre.

Andrew Stringer, Partnership Sergeant, Maidstone, Community Safety Partnership (Kent Police)

The Partnership Sergeant attended the 6 October 2022 Committee Meeting and assisted in providing a member briefing to the Committee on the Town Centre Task Force.

Housing Providers

Several housing providers operating within the town centre were requested to provide written answers to the below questions:

1 – 'How do you (as an organisation) deal with Anti-Social Behaviour issues in relation to enforcing your tenancy agreements?'

2 – 'Whether they would like to consider setting up a specific email response system for MPs and Councillors'

Of the five providers contacted, responses were received from the Medway Housing Society, Paramount Housing and West Kent Housing Association. These can be accessed using the access links for the 20 December 2022 meeting.

Thanks to Witnesses

The Overview and Scrutiny Committee would like to extend its thanks to the Internal and External stakeholders that supported the review, either through providing written evidence and/or attending a meeting of the Committee.

APPENDIX 1 – Information Relating To The Review

Written Information

Agenda and Minutes for the Overview and Scrutiny Committee Meeting held on 6 October 2022: [Your Councillors - Maidstone Borough Council](#)

Agenda and Minutes for the Overview and Scrutiny Committee Meeting held on 18 October 2022: [Your Councillors - Maidstone Borough Council](#)

Agenda and Minutes for the Overview and Scrutiny Committee Meeting held on 20 December 2022: [Your Councillors - Maidstone Borough Council](#)

Agenda and Minutes for the Overview and Scrutiny Committee Meeting held on 21 February 2023: [Your Councillors - Maidstone Borough Council](#)

Committee Membership during the Review

Councillors:

English (Chairman), Cannon (Vice-Chair), Blackmore, Brice, Cleator, Conyard, Garten, Hastie, Hinder, Jeffery, Knatchbull, McKenna and T Wilkinson.

Contact details for the Committee can be found here:

[Your Councillors - Maidstone Borough Council](#)

APPENDIX 2 – Recommendation Table

Recommendation	Relevant Lead Member/Council Officers (as applicable)	Intended outcome
To continue regular meetings with the Kent Police Press Office	Lead Member for Communities and Public Engagement Community and Strategic Partnerships Manager	To support the provision of greater communications on the achievements of the town centre task force.
To investigate the possibility of an Annual Community Safety Partnership Event, with all partners in attendance.	Lead Member for Communities and Public Engagement Community and Strategic Partnerships Manager	To support the provision of greater communications, following specific reference to the below throughout the review: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Partnership working • Successful interventions • Provision of Youth Services • Contact details for partner organisations and council services, such as Domestic Abuse Support
To circulate the Communications Teams updated 'Communications Plan' to Members, to outline all elements of the communications works.	Lead Member for Communities and Public Engagement Communications Manager	As above.
To include information on the Overview and Scrutiny Committee's review within the next iteration of the Borough Insight Magazine.	Lead Member for Communities and Public Engagement Communications Manager	To publicise the Committee's review.

<p>That Kent Police be requested to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Promote the multi-agency work of the Town Centre Task Force; and b. Publicise their community engagement plans, to allow the Council to align its communications actions to this. 	<p>Lead Member for Communities and Public Engagement</p>	<p>To support the provision of greater communications on the achievements of the town centre task force, of which Kent Police is a part of, and support the provision of greater communications on the topic generally.</p>
<p>To encourage all Members to sign up to the 'My Community Voice' facility provided by Kent Police.</p>	<p>Lead Member for Communities and Public Engagement</p>	<p>To support members in their role as elected officials.</p>
<p>To encourage all Members to sign up the 'Stay Connected' online newsletters, produced by the Council.</p>	<p>Lead Member for Communities and Public Engagement Communications Manager</p>	<p>To support members in their role as elected officials, supporting the services providing and engaging with young people, and raising the work undertaken with their political groups.</p>
<p>To provide Members with the contact details for the various (crime) reporting mechanisms.</p>	<p>Lead Member for Communities and Public Engagement Community and Strategic Partnerships Manager</p>	<p>To support members in their role as elected officials, with the information able to be re-distributed if needed.</p>

To provide Members and Officers with Bystander Training.	Lead Member for Communities and Public Engagement Community and Strategic Partnerships Manager	To provide Members and Officers with the tools to de-escalate an issue safely.
To encourage continued engagement from Members with Council activities, such as Member Briefings.	Lead Member for Communities and Public Engagement	To support members in their role as elected officials.
The questions contained within the annual survey on town centre safety be reviewed, to ensure that the questions contained can be used to conduct a benchmarking exercise.	Lead Member for Communities and Public Engagement	To ensure that public feedback is considered following the reviews conclusion and enable year-on-year benchmarking exercises to be conducted.
That a rapporteur be appointed to conduct a post-review evaluation.	Lead Member for Communities and Public Engagement	To monitor the implementation and progress of any of the above actions, if agreed.