

KENT COUNTY COUNCIL

SELECT COMMITTEE - KNIFE CRIME IN KENT

MINUTES of a meeting of the Select Committee - Knife Crime in Kent held in the Darent Room, Sessions House, County Hall, Maidstone on Monday, 10 June 2019.

PRESENT: Mr P V Barrington-King (Chairman), Mrs S Chandler, Mr I S Chittenden, Mr A Cook, Mr P C Cooper, Mr D Farrell, Mr A R Hills, Mr K Pugh and Mr A M Ridgers

ALSO PRESENT:

IN ATTENDANCE: Mr G Romagnuolo (Research Officer - Overview and Scrutiny) and Mrs A Taylor (Scrutiny Research Officer)

UNRESTRICTED ITEMS

3. **Apologies**

(Item 1)

No apologies had been received.

4. **Danielle Bride (Assistant Director (North and West Kent) for Adolescent Services, Open Access and Head of Youth Offending) and Louise Fisher (Head of Service (0-25), Children, Young People and Education)** *(Item 2)*

Dan Bride (Assistant Director for Adolescent Services, Open Access and Head of Youth Offending) and Louise Fisher (Head of Service (0-25), Children Young People and Education - South), KCC were in attendance for this item

(1) The Chair welcomed the guests and thanked them for the information they had shared in advance of the meeting. The Chair invited them to give their presentation. Salient points from the meeting were:

- Definitions of knife crime, with the most common offense being for “possession”.
- There had been a decrease year on year for three years for knife related offences (by young people) in Kent.
- Frequency of knife offences – 243 young people had one knife related offence (between April 2016 – March 2019), reducing to one young person with six offences.
- The highest proportion of youth offences in knife crime (in Kent) were committed by white males from Kent.

- The number of first-time entrants into the Youth Justice System had declined since 2014/15.
- Reoffending rates in Kent were below the national average and in most cases those counties with similar demographics.
- Motivations for carrying a knife included self-protection, self-presentation and to a lesser degree utility (i.e. the person aimed to commit an offence).
- There was a stronger link between knife crime and gangs in London than in Kent.
- The Youth Offending Team used evidence of what worked in order to prevent young people getting involved in knife crime.
- Examples of national initiatives, including the opportunities presented by the Youth Endowment Fund.
- The restructured Adolescents, Open Access and PIAS Service in Kent would allow a core offer of support to those young people needing it.
- All of Kent's activities in relation to youth offending were in partnership with Health, the Police and Crime Commissioner and District Councils.

- (2) Members thanked Ms Bride and Ms Fisher for their presentation.
- (3) Members requested a heat map of Kent showing where offences were committed. This would allow them to understand where areas of concern were. The map, to be shared at the wash-up session, should include:
 - Demographic information about those committing the offences;
 - Ethnicity, and if possible, nationality of offenders;
 - The data over a number of years.
- (4) In addition, a Member asked for data on school exclusion rates in relation to those committing offences.
- (5) Members questioned the impact of gangs in Kent. North Kent was more likely to be affected by London gangs and links to Serious Organised Crime. Their presence can lead to young people carrying, and being the victims of, knife crime.
- (6) Members asked if there was consistency across Kent districts of reducing youth offending. Officers explained there was a Scorecard produced that demonstrated performance, but also assured Members that all services were robustly performance managed with areas of concern looked into straight away.
- (7) In relation to the Youth Endowment Fund, officers explained that the Local Authority were working alongside the Kent Police and Crime Commissioner to design a collaborative bid for extra funding.
- (8) The Committee discussed the services available to young people who offend in Kent.

- Officers explained that the age of youth workers did not matter – it was their ability to engage the young person that was key.
- Contextual safeguarding and ensuring young people felt safe in buildings used for service delivery. The Adolescents, Open Access and PIAS Service would be engaging young people later that year to get their views on this.
- The reduction in local authority budgets – Ms Fisher referred to the evidence base and how it demonstrated a positive reduction in rates of youth offending. She believed it was vital to use the resources available to make the biggest impact.
- The introduction of Early Help workers had really helped prevent young people from getting involved in crime.
- Ms Bride assured the Committee that they had been and would continue to look for opportunities to reduce duplication, such as reducing the number of multi-agency meetings that discuss a single case.
- Long term mentoring had been shown to be far more successful in reducing re-offending rates. There was a body of research in this area, which showed the benefits of a young person feeling safe and supported, particularly through adolescence.
- A Member had read about “the Way” concept (used in Wolverhampton and Dagenham) and asked officers for information about this at the wash up session.

(9) When asked what she would do with more money, Ms Bride said she wouldn't spend it straight away but would learn from emerging evidence from projects underway to inform new initiatives.

(10) Members asked if there was a balance between the provision of universal youth services and youth justice. Ms Bride explained that Youth Justice benefited from a highly skilled workforce with a relatively low turnover of staff. She felt quality training was more important than recruiting more Youth Justice staff. Universal services were shown to be delivering but innovation in the wider market meant training for staff was again key.

5. Mr Roger Gough (Cabinet Member for Children, Young People and Education), Danielle Bride (Assistant Director (North and West Kent) for Adolescent Services, Open Access and Head of Youth Offending) and Louise Fisher (Head of Service (0-25), Children, Young People and Education)
(Item 3)

Dan Bride (Assistant Director for Adolescent Services, Open Access and Head of Youth Offending), Louise Fisher (Head of Service (0-25), Children Young People and Education - South), and Roger Gough (Cabinet Member for Children, Young People and Education) KCC were in attendance for this item

- (1) Mr Gough welcomed the focus of the Select Committee, which not only reflected the national picture but also consistent with the reshaping of in-house services that had been underway. The Adolescents, Open Access and PIAS Service in Kent County Council had been underway for a few months, and had seen the merger of Youth Services, Alternative Provision, Attendance and Behaviour, Inclusion Services and Youth Justice. He spoke of successful projects in Kent, such as the “Supporting Families against Youth Crime” which would see the implementation of a new toolkit at the end of a two year grant funded project. Overall, he felt that KCC had not seen the large spike in knife crime that other areas had but agreed the Council could not be complacent and would continue to work to safeguard young people.
- (2) The Committee questioned the reasons behind young people committing knife crime. Mr Gough referred Members to the earlier presentation and recognised that young people could be both the victim and perpetrator of knife crime. There were multiple risk factors, and the starting point could often be traced back to a significant and prolonged childhood trauma. Ms Fisher referred to the Adolescents, Open Access and PIAS Service and how part of their remit was to understand those characteristics and support those young people that may be vulnerable to becoming an offender.
- (3) In response to a question about partnership working, Ms Bride spoke to the importance and success of multi-agency panels where individual cases of vulnerable young people were discussed. The partnership was instrumental in allowing agencies to share information, along with successful projects. However, the performance of those panels was not consistent across Kent, so the processes were under review.
- (4) Ms Fisher expanded that partnership working involved schools as well. A purely preventative model for reducing knife crime involved working with schools and academies, such as inclusion in PHSE classes. That partnership was a work in progress due to the sheer number of schools in Kent and the changing relationships due to the increase in the number of academies.
- (5) Building on the importance of school attendance, a Member questioned the link between school exclusions and criminality, and the extent to which a restriction in the Local Authority’s powers in that area had an impact. Mr Gough agreed that in his opinion, the Council should have more powers in relation to school exclusions. However, there had been improvement in the quality of the information shared by schools, and the new Ofsted framework also had a focus on off-rolling.
- (6) Asked about the reduction in the Youth Services budget over recent years, Mr Gough did not accept that the service was failing. He accepted it had reduced but argued it had received greater protection than similar services in other counties. Lessons had been learnt over the years and this had been used to improve the service offer; the overall approach had been to sustain capacity.

- (7) In response to a question about the impact of austerity on increasing wider criminality, Mr Gough acknowledged that would have played a part, but considered that other areas, such as housing costs and labour market changes, would also have contributed. He recognised the pressure placed on young people.
- (8) A Member noted the increasing difficulty in finding community role models, that young people could look up to and aspire to be.
- (9) Questioned why knife offences had seen an increase in recent years, Ms Fisher explained that Serious Organised Crime Groups preyed on young people and their ability to use County Lines. Those groups were likely to use violence against the vulnerable young people, which could in turn result in those young people using violence against others. The issues of child exploitation and child trafficking were relatively new, as were the dynamics of social media and instant communications.
- (10) The Chair thanked the officers and Cabinet Member for attending the Select Committee and commended them for their work around youth offending.
- (11) Ms Bride concluded by saying the following were key:
 - holistic public health approach;
 - building on existing partnerships;
 - a focus on preventative and early-intervention strategies;
 - improving upon what was already working.

6. Mr Michael Hill, OBE (Cabinet Member for Community and Regulatory Services) and Shafick Peerbux (Head of Community Safety, Public Protection Service)
(Item 4)

Mr Michael Hill, OBE (Cabinet Member for Community and Regulatory Services) and Shafick Peerbux (Head of Community Safety, Public Protection Service) were in attendance for this item.

- 1) **Paul Barrington-King:** Welcomed Mike Hill and Shafick Peerbux to the Committee and invited them to make their opening remarks.
- 2) **Mike Hill:** Commended the idea of knife crime as a topic for a select committee as it was a matter of enormous importance. He outlined his role in relation to having the Cabinet portfolio for community safety and public protection. He was the Cabinet link to the Police and Crime Commissioner (PCC) and Kent Police). He was Chair of the Police and Crime Panel (PCP) and the Kent Community Safety Partnership (KCSP).
- 3) **Shafick Peerbux:** Spoke to a presentation. He explained he had been the head of service for community safety at Kent County Council (KCC) for four years and had

worked with or for the police in one form or another for nearly twenty years. His remit covered two areas. The first was the joint multi-agency Kent Community Safety Team (KCST). This supported local Community Safety Units (CSUs), promoting consistency of practice, facilitating joint working and sharing best practice. The second area was that he headed up the community warden service at KCC. The first area was his focus, considering the role of partnerships in how problems are addressed.

- 4) He explained that the safeguarding boards played an important role in safeguarding people from exploitation. The role of the KCSP at county level was set by legislation and so was different to local Community Safety Partnerships (CSPs). The key functions the KCSP undertook was leading and coordinating between agencies, facilitating cross-county coordination on issues. It also oversaw the production of a statutory strategy (Community Safety Agreement – CSA). It also commissioned Domestic Homicide Reviews, but that was less key to the subject under discussion.
- 5) The CSA was a key document that brought local CSPs priorities together alongside the statutory partners. It was supplemented by a county level analysis utilising police methodology. Partner plans were also considered, and due regard is paid to the PCC's Safer in Kent Plan. The Partnership had to be mindful of changes in legislation, and undertakes horizon scanning and PEST analyses. There had been a recent consultation by the Government around a new legal duty around serious violence and multi-agency action. The proposals indicated that the new legal duty would either be given to the KCC, police and other responsible authorities or CSPs.
- 6) District priorities are mapped, with the last assessments being prior to December. These informed the local community safety plans and fed into the community safety agreement. Knife crime was not explicitly mentioned but was covered in wider categories as serious and organised crime and safeguarding vulnerable people. Two-thirds of the district's had priorities that covered both and just over half referenced violence in one form or another. All agreed that early intervention and prevention is key to the work.
- 7) Moving onto the work of the KCSP, Mr Peerbux explained that 18 months ago a conference was put on for community safety partners about protecting vulnerable people from organised crime. 200 people attended and one of the key speakers was Paul Mackenzie. He spoke about gangs and the draw they have on young people, and the connection with carrying knives. He also spoke about the importance of community engagement and having long-term mentors to whom young people can relate.
- 8) The follow-up through the KCST was a Serious Organised Crime (SOC) workshop with district and boroughs to understand where the issues were in the county and develop a local understanding of the picture. Since then, local areas have taken ownership, local serious and organised crime groups have been set up, where ownership of those groups is taken and signposting of vulnerable people to appropriate support services.
- 9) Most CSPs have priorities around SOC and the KCSP, through the KCST have a conduit and regular communication with the local CSUs. There are different approaches being taken locally. Dartford has enhanced its CCTV and trading

standards are targeting the selling of knives. In Ashford, there is a knife crime event being planned for parents and carers at a local cinema and their 'Safety in Action' week is focussing on the element of personal choice. Medway CSP are holding a conference next month and this is focussing on gangs, early intervention and the role of sport. Dover CSP was working on a parenting programme with Early Help colleagues.

- 10) Targeting the issue was multi-faceted. It required enforcement but also awareness raising and support and training. CSP funding primarily went on the latter. The funding granted to the KCSP by the PCC supplemented this and worked to ensure consistency and quality. A voluntary organisation in east Kent had been granted funding to give people the tools to deal this. Where there were a lot of voluntary groups working around gangs, the result was sometimes inconsistent messages being given or facilitating fear so there was work looking at standardising the product to address this.
- 11) A recent Kent bid to the Trusted Relationship Fund to fund a peer mentoring approach was not successful and the winning bids were mainly in metropolitan areas. However, the work was then transferred to bidding for another government fund. This was successful and is funding a North Kent and Medway serious violence project.
- 12) The PCC has a violence reduction challenge and the KCSP has to pay due regard to PCC strategies. The violence reduction challenge ending up focussing on serious violence, in particular, the most serious violent offenders causing the most harm to the most vulnerable. Which recommendations could be taken through the KCSP has been looked at. Three are being taken forward. Two were on trauma informed practice with one giving £10k match funding for work alongside youth justice, and the other building staff awareness and utilising trauma-informed practice on casework. The third focused on Knife Crime Retail Surveillance and Enforcement and work with trading standards.
- 13) Further joint working was highlighted. Some of the KCST's work supported the promotion of police campaigns tackling knife crime. For example, Op Sceptre tackled those carrying knives. There was educational activity and a package developed to have conversations with young people through the police's "Don't let a knife take a life" campaign. There was mention of contextual safeguarding and the importance of information and intelligence sharing. The Kent and Medway gangs strategy had a key output to do this latter activity and community wardens were mentioned as a source of information. One warden was working with a local charity on an anti-knife crime initiative on having safe places in shops for young people who did not felt at risk or threatened.
- 14) A longer-term view needed to be adopted. Scotland had adopted a public health approach ten years ago and had seen the benefits of that approach. There was a need to share information and best practice. Also, with all the new developments in Kent there was a need to ensure that there were enough safe open spaces for children and young people as well as having sufficient accessible, structured recreational programmes.

- 15) **Mike Hill:** He spoke of the strategic view of where things were going. He had met the Chief Constable the week before. The Chief Constable divided the problem into two – the here and now and the future. The here and now was clearly a police problem; it was not as bad in Kent as elsewhere but needed tackling robustly. KCC had a role in longer-term supporting the police and there were a number of areas of the County Council that could help. KCC had continued to provide services for young people and open access youth despite financial restraints, and there was a need to retain this as a priority. His own portfolio covered the Kent school games and the use of sports and the arts to provide diversionary activity for young people. The Art31 youth arts organisation worked across the county and Mike Hill had met the CEO of the Arts Council at the Art31 launch the previous year. Libraries were a key place to allow young people a safe place to work. Community wardens and trading standards had big role too. Prevention is a key KCC role in support of the police.
- 16) **Ken Pugh:** Supported the work being done by community wardens. He explained that when he was a Cabinet Member in Swale covering the Community Safety Unit (CSU), there were regular meetings with the police and questions asked about county lines and gangs but there was denial by the police they existed in the past.
- 17) **Mike Hill:** He confirmed that the police were now firmly focussed on the problems of drugs, county lines and gangs.
- 18) **Shafick Peerbux:** He also agreed and said CSUs looked at this issue now.
- 19) **Sue Chandler:** She explained she was also involved in CSU work locally. CSPs and KCC could have more input over longer-term issues. She had recently attended a Year 6 safe choice session. This was both reassuring and frightening. Two Year six pupils had been identified as at risk. The issue was raised of the balance to be struck between creating fear and raising awareness.
- 20) **Shafick Peerbux:** Fear didn't work with young people as a tactic. A standardised product was needed in a safe environment. Education safeguarding teams reports from fear could create issues. The standardised product did not yet exist.
- 21) **Sue Chandler:** Fear caused all sorts of issues, with information from elsewhere needing balancing.
- 22) **Shafick Peerbux:** It wasn't a case of not doing it, but it needed to be structured.
- 23) **Sue Chandler:** Parents fear also causes issues and they are harder to access.
- 24) **Shafick Peerbux:** There are isolated programmes for parents. The KCSP team was aiming to share good practice from those that work.
- 25) **Dara Farrell:** He had heard how well the youth offending service was doing and asked how Kent compared to elsewhere and whether the youth service practice met the youth service commissioning vision.

- 26) **Mike Hill:** It was not a mature market when the youth service was first commissioned. It was not universally successful but generally good, though patchy. It was more successful when recommissioned. The exercise was a success but there was a need to review providers over time. There had been a change of culture with providers as well. There was a need for careful contract monitoring.
- 27) **Andrew Cook:** He had been involved in community safety work for nine years. He said he had visits from police talking about gangs if not county lines and wondered if the information sharing was joined up with some areas more aware of gangs than others. He asked if there were the resources to get to young people before they joined gangs, not afterwards.
- 28) **Shafick Peerbux:** It was not consistent, and consistency needed to be promoted.
- 29) **Mike Hill:** There was not as many resources available as he would like but KCC had done better than most.
- 30) **Andrew Cook:** In a period of austerity, youth services were being cut back. He asked if the cuts were accelerating.
- 31) **Mike Hill:** The County Council was doing all it could to protect the budget.
- 32) **Tony Hills:** he explained his support for community wardens being the local eyes and ears. The previous presenters were coming back with a heat map of knife crime and asked whether it was possible to have a heat map of community wardens.
- 33) **Shafick Peerbux:** Producing a heat map should be possible.
- 34) **Dara Farrell:** Kent had seen a 157% increase in knife crime and the Youth Offending team had spent money on first aid for knife crime.
- 35) **Shafick Peerbux:** Unable to comment on other areas but the Youth Offending Service in Kent was passionate about their work and the leadership around the new adolescent service was good. He agreed prevention was the priority but the first aid training was needed now for those at risk of exploitation.
- 36) **Ian Chittenden:** He explained that he found it hard to believe with the substantial cuts that services were achieving what they used to.
- 37) **Mike Hill:** He stood by what he had said. The service was smaller but still robust and still provided good outcomes for the people of Kent. The basic structure was in place and could be expanded when more resources were available.
- 38) **Dara Farrell:** £1.7m had been cut from youth services, with 24 youth centres shut. He said there was a clear correlation between knife crime going up and the reduction in spending.
- 39) **Mike Hill:** A commissioning budget had been in place since 2011.

- 40) **Paul Barrington-King:** He was a supporter of CSPs. A recurring theme for CSPs was CCTV. In his local area, the man hours devoted to reviewing them had decreased and they were not monitored live. The police did not provide additional funding locally and it was rare elsewhere. The question was asked whether some funding from the police was possible to enable rigorous monitoring.
- 41) **Mike Hill:** This was an annual issue and the cost shunt question was difficult. There was a PCP meeting on Wednesday, and he undertook to put forward a question on this topic.
- 42) **Paul Barrington-King:** Mr Hill was thanked for this. The guests were asked what they would include in the Committee's recommendations about what KCC should be doing but aren't.
- 43) **Mike Hill:** KCC needed to be doing more of the same.
- 44) **Paul Barrington-King:** The guests were thanked, and the session came to an end.