

SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

MINUTES of a meeting of the Scrutiny Committee held in the Council Chamber, Sessions House, County Hall, Maidstone on Wednesday, 19 July 2023.

PRESENT: Mr A Booth (Chairman), Mr P V Barrington-King (Vice-Chairman), Mrs R Binks, Mr T Bond, Mr N J Collor, Mrs L Game, Mr A J Hook, Mrs S Hudson, Rich Lehmann, Mr H Rayner, Mr O Richardson and Dr L Sullivan

IN ATTENDANCE: Ms S Annan-Veitch (Policy Advisor), Ms S Brinson (Community Safety Team Leader), Ms Z Cooke (Corporate Director of Finance), Ms E Feakins (Chief Accountant), Mr M Hill (Cabinet Member for Community and Regulatory Services), Ms J Mookherjee (Consultant in Public Health), Mr P Oakford (Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Finance, Corporate and Traded Services), Mr S Peerbux (Head of Community Safety), Mr J Potts (Democratic Services Officer), Mr M Powell (Director of the Violence Reduction Unit), Supt Peter Steenhuis (Kent Police), Ms A Taylor (Scrutiny Research Officer), and Ms R Westlake (Senior Commissioner)

UNRESTRICTED ITEMS

6. Declarations of Interests by Members in items on the Agenda for this Meeting (Item)

Mr Hook made a declaration on item C1, that he worked for the CPS as a lawyer & that his wife was a probation officer.

Dr Sullivan made a declaration on item C1, that her husband was deputy leader of Gravesham Borough Council, was Chair of Gravesham Community Safety Partnership (CSP) and a member of Kent CSP.

7. Minutes of the meeting held on 6 June 2023 (Item A4)

RESOLVED that, subject to the inclusion of Mrs Game on the attendees of the meeting, the minutes were an accurate record and they be signed by the Chairman.

8. Kent Community Safety Agreement (Item C1)

Mr Hill OBE, Cabinet Member for Community and Regulatory Services, Mr Peerbux, Head of Community Safety, Superintendent Peter Steenhuis & Inspector Peter Ballard of Kent Police, Ms Mookherjee Public Health Consultant, Mr Powel, Director of the Violence Reduction Unit, Ms Annan-Veitch, Project and Programme Manager, Ms Westlake, Commissioner and Jess Harman, Prevent Co-ordinator were present for this item.

1. Mr Hill introduced the item.
2. Mr Peerbux provided an overview of the functions of the Kent Community Safety Partnership (KCSP). He explained that the Kent Community Safety Agreement drew together several partner agencies and the priorities arising from the local strategic assessments to set out priorities for the county.
3. Superintendent Steenhuis updated Members on actions taken by Kent Police. As part of their new neighbourhood policing approach, he told Members that all wards would be assigned a named beat officer who would act as a point of contact for the community and every district would have a neighbourhood task force established to address long term Anti-Social Behaviour (ASB). In addition, a Child Centred Policing Team had been established to engage with young people and schools. He assured Members that Strategic Prevention Command would oversee these areas and focus on the priorities set by the Community Safety Agreement. He told Members that an app, 'My Community Voice', had been established to connect the Police with community members. It would allow the sharing information both ways and would help map locations of concern.
4. Mr Powell provided an update on the work of the Violence Reduction Unit (VRU). He told Members that Central Government had placed a Serious Violence Duty on authorities and that this required specific authorities to establish organisational arrangements, produce a need assessment and develop a joint strategy by January 2024. He told Members that there were 20 authorities in Kent and Medway and that the VRU had been holding workshops with these authorities to draft plans in this area. He also explained that the VRU had been developing a shared database between organisations including KCC and Kent Police to cut down on the time taken to manually request and send information. He reminded Members that funding for the VRU from Central Government would only last until March 2025 and he felt the database would provide a legacy and good value for money. The VRU had also been working alongside the DWP to support those between the ages of 18-25 to reduce criminality. Lastly, he updated the committee on violence in Kent, he told Members that children were overrepresented as suspects and victims of violence, and this remained a concern. In particular they wanted to see a reduction in the number of children using and being harmed by weapons. He also told Members that since 2019 they had seen a reduction in the amount of violent behaviour caused by the nighttime economy –an area they had been monitoring closely.
5. Ms Mookherjee provided an update on the work of the Public Health team with a specific focus on substance misuse. She told Members that the Dame Carol Black Review into drugs published in 2021 had raised concerns over cuts to substance misuse care and rehabilitation services and this had been an area of focus for her team and central government, Kent had seen Drug and Alcohol deaths increase in recent years, but these were still below the national average. She told Members that Kent had received significant investment into drug treatment services in recent years and Ms Mookherjee reported that Kent had a higher-than-average rate of successful treatment. She told Members that the challenge had been getting people to come forward and access treatment and the number of people accessing detox services in Kent was

lower than the national average. She told Members that to address this, her team had been working to train professionals in healthcare and adult social care to signpost people towards detox and substance misuse services.

6. Ms Annan-Veitch told Members her team had been working to develop a new Kent and Medway Domestic Abuse Strategy and a progress report outlining the successes of the previous strategy. They had held workshops with frontline staff to find areas of best practice and in need of improvement. The consultation would be between 24th July and 9th October and that an update would be given at the Policy and Resources Cabinet Committee. Ms Westlake discussed the integrated service commissioned to tackle domestic abuse. She told Members that a formal review had been completed and that the service was performing well. She told Members the contract for the service had been extended until the end of March 2026. She informed Members that new services had been commissioned since the introduction of the Domestic Abuse Act and the PCC was also working on tackling domestic abuse and had been increasing the number of independent domestic violence advisors.
7. Mr Peerbux concluded the report by updating Members on the remaining priorities. On Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG) he told Members that his team had delivered a conference aimed at increasing professional awareness on the issues and share best practice. He told Members the conference had been very successful and that 90% of respondents rated it as 'excellent' or 'very good'. Since then, they had produced a resource pack which had been shared with the delegates. On preventing extremism and hate he told Members that the Prevent Team along with Counterterrorism police had been undertaking work on this following the independent review of the Prevent scheme, which had made several recommendations in this area. He told Members the national threat level for terrorism was rated substantial, meaning that an attack is likely and that concerns had turned to self-initiated terrorists which were more difficult to disrupt. On Road safety he told Members that there had been a significant focus on strengthening county-wide collaboration in line with the Vision Zero Strategy. Lastly, on safeguarding vulnerable people, he told Members that KCSP works to address this, including by addressing scams through Trading Standards and the Community Wardens, and identifying lessons from domestic homicide reviews.
8. Members made the following statements and asked the following questions.
 - a) The Chairman confirmed that in future he'd like the presentation provided ahead of the meeting to allow Members to provide better scrutiny and requested a copy of the presentation to be circulated to all Members.
 - b) Members asked how e-scooters on roads and pavements were being tackled. Mr Steenhuis told Members the police at the time were taking a warn and inform approach, taking peoples details and letting them know that E-scooters were illegal to use on the roads. Mr Steenhuis told Members that a paper was being developed on E-scooters for senior officers and that there were concerns around the use of E-scooters due to lack of cycle paths and other infrastructure better suited to them.
 - c) A Member applauded My Community Voice and its integration with the national neighbourhood watch organisation. They asked how the app

would be developed further and another Member asked how Community Voice was being publicised and was concerned that some Members were unaware of the scheme. A Member asked if crimes could be reported via the app. Mr Steenhuis told Members that in future they hope to broaden the app's use and provided the example of using the app to warn of flooding. On how the app was being publicised, Mr Steenhuis told Members that his team had been engaging with parish councils, hosting pop-up stands and speaking to local newspapers. He believed it was important to seek Members support and asked Members to spread awareness of the app.

- d) On rural crime, Mr Steenhuis told Members his team had developed a 3-day rural policing course as part of training for beat officers. The sergeant for the rural task force had attended a national course to further develop training for his officers. He told Members his team would liaise with rural communities to understand what area they would like officers to have greater training in.
- e) A Member asked how the police were tackling ASB and drug use amongst young people in education. Ms Mookherjee discussed her teams work with schools and told Members drugs and alcohol had been an area of focus. Mr Steenhuis added that his team worked with schools and that 70 officers had been assigned to engage with schools and increase confidence in the police.
- f) A Member applauded the work being done to tackle violence against women and girls (VAWG). They asked whether work was being carried out to address violence against men and boys. Mr Steenhuis told Members VAWG was a real issue and required further focus. He told Members that violence against other groups continued to be taken seriously but that VAWG had additional elements which required a separate approach and provided the example of addressing the culture of the night-time economy.
- g) A Member raised concerns about the number of people breaking the speed limit. Mr Steenhuis told Members this was always going to be a difficult issue and that the resources were not available to provide enforcement everywhere. He told Members that understanding the flow of traffic and designing infrastructure to prevent speeding would be the best way to address this problem.
- h) A Member noted that data shown that ASB was down 18% compared to previous years and asked whether this was due to the pandemic. Mr Steenhuis told Members that this was due to Covid-19 rules from the previous year counting towards ASB figures and as lockdown and rules were eased, the overall figure dropped. A Member asked if the figures could be provided with Covid-19 rules and regulations filtered out to better understand the current level of ASB.
- i) A Member raised concerns about Margate and Thanet, they told the committee that they'd had a taskforce in place for years and had not seen a reduction in crime or substance misuse. Mr Steenhuis told Members that the Taskforces had been very successful and used an evidence-based approach to tackle crime and substance misuse.

- j) Members raised their concerns about the police's approach to ASB and young people. They believed that a lax response to ASB in youth was leading to more serious crime later in life. Ms Mookherjee responded that young people involved in ASB often have complicated lives and parents and that greater support needs to be given to these families. She told Members that had to be proportionate and that they currently used a carrot and stick approach. Mr Powell told Members that ASB caused by young people was a significant challenge and that his team focused on groups of young people operating together. He said it was important to provide support to the children but agreed that swift enforcement was necessary as a deterrent. He told Members that this was a resource intensive approach, and the VRU and Police can only focus on so many groups at once but that this approach was successful and was evidence-based. He said it was important to discover the driver of ASB and find alternative activities for young people. Mr Steenhuis added that seasonal campaigns were held where district commanders assessed ASB in their areas and placed a bid for additional funding. In addition, he said the Home Office had provided a considerable amount of funding to increase patrols in ASB hotspots during peak times. He said it was important now to develop community confidence and that this would be a long process. He told Members that the neighbourhood policing model was still being developed and was at 50% of maturity.
- k) A Member raised their concerns over the time taken to get domestic abuse victims and substance abusers support and access to programmes. Ms Westlake told Members that when police attend domestic abuse incidents information is shared with domestic abuse support providers who will contact victims as soon as possible. Ms Mookherjee added that multi-agency risk assessment conferences are help for people at 'high risk' of harm and that these meetings seek a multiagency response to support a person impacted by abuse. On substance abuse she told Members that the NHS had been developing integrated community teams to advocate for people across agencies and speed up access to services.
- l) A Member asked how successful community and safety partnerships were and asked whether there was difficulty in organising meetings. Mr Steenhuis said if Members were concerned about local CSPs to contact him, and this could be discussed.
- m) A Member asked whether KCC's approach to providing young people with community activities could impact crime as 80% of ASB offenders committed crime in childhood. Mr Hill responded that the family hub model provided support which included diversionary activities. He told Members that an inhouse provision would be provided in future. Mr Steenhuis added that the police worked with family hubs and youth justice teams and that diversionary activities were an important aspect of their work.
- n) A Member raised their concerns about distrust towards the police from young people and asked how their image could be improved amongst young people. Mr Steenhuis responded that an impact was seen

following the withdrawal of officers assigned to schools and headteachers had raised their concerns following the withdrawal. Since the introduction of the neighbourhood policing plan, 90 officers had been re-assigned and the police recognised that there was a lack of confidence and believed the new model was working and would increase trust.

- o) A Member raised their concern that people with children may be reluctant to access detox and rehabilitation services out of fears of Social Services getting involved with their parenting.
- p) A Member asked if criminal damage is considered ASB. Mr Steenhuis told Members that the Police take a holistic approach to what constitutes ASB to address the concerns of the community. Mr Steenhuis told Members that the Police had placed a greater emphasis on prevention, and this had been key to tackling ASB.
- q) A Member asked how serious violence was defined and asked why robbery had been included. Mr Powell responded that the Government's strategy and guidance did not give a clear definition and left this to be determined at a local level. He told Members that robbery had been included due to the high levels in Kent and the potential for serious harm during robberies. He told Members that it is important that they filter minor robberies from dangerous ones and told Members they were continuing to develop this area and would reflect on the process over the next year.
- r) A Member asked how the partnership had been affected by the increase in migrants coming to the UK and the increase in populations more generally. Mr Peerbux responded that this had put greater pressure on all public services particularly social care services.
- s) A Member asked how greater awareness and rise of vulnerable people and their needs had impacted the partnership. Mr Peerbux responded that the increase in vulnerable people in recent years had been felt across the service. Staff were having to be increasingly upskilled to understand complex needs and how best to respond to them. Ms Mookherjee told Members that working more closely with the NHS would be beneficial in this area.
- t) A Member asked how the loss of community wardens would impact services. Mr Hill responded that he was concerned about cuts to wardens but told Members the new Neighbourhood Policing Model did offset negatives somewhat. Mr Peerbux told Members that a public consultation was ongoing on the Community Wardens and their role and function. He said it was important to maintain the remit of Wardens and consider carefully where they are deployed. The consultation is due to run until the 3rd of October 2023.
- u) A Member asked if the Violence Reduction Unit could continue following the cessation of government funding in 2025. Mr Powell responded that they were a relatively small team and that their focus had been on collating and analysing information across organisations. He told Members they regularly scan through reports to establish trends and liaise with organisations to create a joined-up approach. He said it would be difficult to gain sufficient funding from partners to continue

with the same level of staffing and funding available to services but they were uncertain what central government would decide.

- v) A Member asked if prevent included environmental groups. Ms Harman told Members that it was important to tackle all ideological causes of terrorism and to rehabilitate people who would commit terrorist acts. She told Members that the recommendations of the review into prevent had been accepted by government and a new document released.
- w) A Member asked how best practice is shared between counties. Mr Hill told Members that there is a great deal of liaison within Kent but that there were opportunities for greater sharing with other authorities and agencies. He raised the VAWG conference as a good example of how liaison could work. Mr Steenhuis told Members that regional prevention and dover meetings were chaired by Kent Police who worked with neighbouring regions to co-ordinate policing. He told Members that best practice was important to Kent Police, and they had collaborated with Thames Valley Police recently to improve. Mr Peerbux added that KCC were part of a national forum which shares best practices in community safety.
- x) Mr Hill summarised that it had been a busy year and it had been difficult balancing economic pressures with the increase in number of people accessing services. He praised partners and the Chairman joined his praise.

POST MEETING NOTE: The presentation was circulated to Members on Thursday 20 July 2023.

RESOLVED – that the Scrutiny Committee note the refreshed Community Safety Agreement (April 2023) and ask that there be a continuation of the promotion of education work with services including Kent Fire and Rescue. There should also be a continued focus on youth provision.

9. Revenue and Capital Budget Outturn Report 2022-23

(Item D1)

Mr Oakford, Deputy Leader, Zena Cooke, Corporate Director for Finance and Emma Feakins, Chief Accountant were in attendance for this item.

1. Mr Oakford introduced the item. He told Members the 2022/23 budget had been prepared amongst increased spending pressures and complexity following the pandemic and invasion of Ukraine. He reminded Members that spending growth forecasts had been based on the inflation data at the time of the budget and that the risk reserves established in 2021 & 2022 were made available to mitigate the risks in the 2022/23 budget. He told Members that during 2022/23 the provisional revenue outturn position was an overspend of £44.4 million. He told Members there were significant overspends in Children's, Young People and Education of £32.7 million and in Adult Social Care totalling £24.4 million. He explained that the overspend would require the full utilisation of the risk reserve of just under £25 million with the remaining £22 million being drawn from the general fund reserve.
2. Members asked the following questions:

- a) A Member asked how much was currently in general reserves. Mr Oakford confirmed that £35 million was left in general reserves.
- b) A Member commented that the report was a comprehensive analysis and praised the amount of work that had gone into the report and its clear presentation of information. The Member raised concerns about the rate at which the budget for Adult and Children's Social Care Services was growing year on year. The Member said that these areas would need to be reviewed and a leaner service provided in future. The Member raised concerns at the amount needed to be drawn from the reserves and the difficulty ahead in balancing the budget.
- c) A Member raised concerns over the use of short-term beds and the high amount this was costing. With £30 million spent on this the Member asked if the money would not be better spent finding a long-term solution. They also raised concerns over the cost of supported living and asked why better provisions were not made for these services. They told the committee that given the number of people crossing the channel and entering Kent these services should expect growing demand and asked how the influx in migrants had impacted services. Mr Oakford responded that a comprehensive review into social services was underway. He said that he had concerns over how much of the Council's budget was being spent on a small percentage of the population. He also raised concerns by the way in which the NHS discharge patients and then transfer contracts for their beds to KCC and that this had accounted for much of the temporary bed costs. He also told the committee that the costs of looking after children had increased drastically and many of the children cared for in Kent came from other authorities including London. On migrants he said the cost of direct care was covered by central government, but costs had risen due to demands on education and other services supplied by KCC that could be accessed by Children. Mr Oakford told Members that he had been liaising with Kent MPs to ask them to engage with Ministers to get support for the county in areas of increased cost due to the county's unique geography. He raised his concerns that if the budgets for adult's and children's social care were not brought under control the council's overspend would reach a dangerous point.
- d) A Member raised concerns over the Faversham Swing Bridge they asked why the Medway Ports Authority were not contributing towards the costs of the project. Mr Oakford responded that KCC were responsible for a road across the body of water but that this could be a fixed bridge, however an agreement had been made many years ago.
- e) A Member commented that they would like to have seen how many service users are supported by each service to better understand costs per person. They raised concerns about the NHS discharge system and told Members they hoped more people could be discharged to their homes. Mr Oakford told Members that his team were looking into this and trying to find a cost per head for people per service to identify where costs are accrued. He told Members he was keen to find discrepancies and identify areas for savings.
- f) A Member told the committee that they didn't believe the Council got value for money from the sale of its assets. Mr Oakford responded that the approach was to maximise the value for each piece of property and that this had been effective. He told Members that KCC look at whether buildings can be better

utilised internally before it is decided to sell them. More recently this has included whether property being converted into accommodation would save KCC money.

- g) A Member asked for assurances that proper assessments would be taken before cuts were made. They also asked whether the cabinet Member had looked at the opposition's alternative budget. Mr Oakford told the committee that he had requested that Finance report were put on every cabinet committee agenda and that he intended to make cabinet members more responsible for the financial aspects of their brief. Mr Oakford told Members that the opposition budget was not a full budget and did not pass the rigorous tests required. He raised concerns over the deliverability of the opposition budget, and he reiterated the need to deliver savings quickly to deliver a balanced budget. The Chair interjected that he would like to see better cross-party co-operation on the budget. A Member added that the budget proposed by the opposition parties would not be sufficient to respond to the scale of problem facing KCC.
- h) A Member commented that they hoped efficiencies could be found to allow money to go further. The Member raised concerns about KCC's financial situation and asked the Cabinet Member when he would learn how much would be provided by central government. Mr Oakford responded that they would only find out how much they would receive from Government late into the year.
- i) Ms Cooke told Members that the concerns were real and serious. She told Members they could not afford to overspend in this financial year and decisions must be taken very rapidly to bring the council finances to a reasonable position. She told Members that the plan was to replenish the reserves over the next 2 years to the minimum required and this too would cost significant amounts.
- j) A Member raised concerns over commissioned services and the lack of scrutiny and accountability of these contracts.
- k) Mr Oakford concluded, expressing his wish that opposition Members engage with him at the earliest opportunity. He reiterated that ideas must be deliverable and that the Council must work at speed to solve the financial problems.

RESOLVED that the Scrutiny Committee note the report.

10. Work Programme

(Item E1)

1. Members requested a further update on Budget Monitoring, the timing of this to be confirmed.
2. Members also raised queries about the costs of Home to School Transport and requested that this be brought to the most appropriate committee.
3. A Member raised the costs of Thanet Parkway and the Sturry Compulsory Purchase Order decision – both of which would be considered for a future agenda.

RESOLVED that subject to the inclusion of the above items the work programme be noted.