

SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

MINUTES of a meeting of the Scrutiny Committee held in the Council Chamber, Sessions House, County Hall, Maidstone on Thursday, 2 October 2025.

PRESENT: Mr R G Streatfeild, MBE (Chair), Mr A Brady (Vice-Chair), Mr J Eustace, Mr J Finch (Substitute for Mr W Chapman), Mr A J Hook, Ms I Kemp, Mr M A J Hood, Mrs S Hudson, Mr T Mole, Mr T L Shonk and Dr G Sturley and Mr D Truder.

ALSO PRESENT: Mrs M Lawes

IN ATTENDANCE: Superintendent P Steenhuis (Kent Police), Mr S Peerbux (Head of Community Safety), Mr M Rolfe (Head of Community Protection), Ms S Brinson (KCC Community Safety), Mr M Bunting (Vision Zero Strategy Manager), Ms J Mookherjee (Consultant in Public Health), Ms R Westlake (Senior Commissioner), Mr N Wilkinson (Assistant Director Contest and Serious Organised Crime (SOC)), Superintendent P Steenhuis (Kent Police), Mrs Clare Bright (Associate Director - Safeguarding, Kent & Medway NHS), Mrs Katie Castle (Head of Service, East Kent, Probation), Ms Jess Harman (Kent & Medway Prevent and Channel Coordinator) and Mrs A Taylor (Assistant Democratic Services Manager (Scrutiny))

UNRESTRICTED ITEMS

15. Apologies and Substitutes

(Item A1)

Apologies had been received from Mr Chapman for whom Mr Finch was present as substitute.

16. Declarations of Interests by Members in items on the Agenda for this Meeting

(Item A2)

1. Mr Hook declared that he was a Lawyer in private practice and his wife was a serving Probation Officer.

17. Kent Community Safety Agreement

(Item B1)

1. Mr Peerbux, Head of Community Safety, introduced the report and delivered a presentation which outlined the purpose and the functions of the Kent Community Safety Partnership.
 - a. It was highlighted that the Partnership team worked with local partners to tackle community safety issues, it operated as a county-level strategic coordinating group with a statutory responsibility for developing a comprehensive community safety strategy.

- b. Upcoming focus areas for the partnership included neighbourhood policing updates, domestic abuse commissioning work and continued cross agency collaboration.
2. Superintendent Steenhuis, Kent Police, explained that Kent Police had introduced a new neighbourhood policing model, which aimed to deliver more targeted and community focused policing across the county, with several key components
 - a. As part of the Neighbourhood Beat Teams Initiative, each ward had a named officer that the resident could identify online by entering their post code.
 - b. Child-Centred Policing Teams, made-up of beat officers and Police Community Safety Officers (PCSOs), focused on youth engagement and worked closely with schools and the Youth Justice Team. Knife awareness programmes had been delivered to over 20,000 students.
 - c. Neighbourhood Task Teams based in each district supported beat officers by addressing complex issues such as antisocial behaviour with particular focus on town centres, retail crime and actions to protect women and girls.
 - d. The Rural Taskforce had achieved significant results in tackling serious thefts, particularly involving farm machinery.
 - e. Prevention Hubs provided centralised support across areas including anti social behaviour, drugs, licencing and child-centred policing, all aimed at crime prevention and community engagement.
3. Ms Cain, Commissioner, provided the Committee with an overview of the Sanctuary Access for Eligible Residents Scheme (SAFER Scheme).
 - a. The SAFER Scheme was launched in March 2024 to help domestic abuse survivors remain safely in their homes through security enhancements and support services.
 - b. In the first thirteen months, the scheme received 810 referrals, with 75% of households receiving security improvements. It supported 1013 children and targeted underrepresented groups including men, people with disabilities and those in private housing across both high deprivation and affluent areas.
 - c. Kent also began developing a Cyber Sanctuary Scheme to launch in 2026, offering cyber security advice, home visits and training to address technology enabled abuse, which affected over 72% of service users.
4. In response to comments and questions it was said:
 - a. Kent Police did not have off-road motorbikes, due to budget constraints, instead drone technology was utilised to address the issue of anti-social behaviour. Superintendent Steenhuis highlighted the importance of encouraging the public to report incidents and working with landowners to limit unauthorised off-road vehicle use.
 - b. The specialist Anti-Social Behaviour Team (ASB) had managed complex cases, with ASB identified as a priority across all Community Safety Units. Effective partnership models, such as in Tonbridge, had been encouraged throughout the districts. Targeted action against the top 20 retail crime offenders, supported by criminal behaviour orders and substance misuse interventions, had resulted in reduced offending. ASB reporting had increased following enhanced community

engagement and a review of recording processes, which had strengthened data accuracy and operational response. Offender tag monitoring had also supported targeted follow-up near reported crime locations.

- c. There was no specific crime category for violence against women and girls but related offences were monitored closely under the lead of Chief Superintendent Emma Banks. Work had focused on early intervention in schools to challenge behaviours, targeted enforcement, diversionary measures and the use of alternative outcomes to ease court pressures. It was agreed that statistical data could be provided at a later date.
- d. A range of educational workbooks had been developed for use by officers, covering topics such as retail crime, behaviour and hate crime. It was highlighted that over 90% of those who completed the workbooks had not reoffended. Training had been delivered through the Violence Reduction Unit and Community Safety Unit, including education in schools and bystander training for licenced premises and door staff. Prevention remained challenging to measure but had shown positive impact.
- e. The success of schemes such as QR codes on taxis to allow individuals to report instances of inappropriate behaviour or refusal to drive a vulnerable individual and taxi driving training was also highlighted. The team worked closely with districts to address local issues using dedicated problem-solving funds, with a particular focus on town centre hotspots. Joint training was delivered in schools, supported by the Child-Centred Policing Team and key messages were shared with universities during Freshers Week. Prevent Education Officers reached 17,100 children across Kent and Medway with sessions including extreme misogyny awareness. The team also referenced the Adolescents programme on Netflix and highlighted strong partnership working with Kent Police and the Child-Centred Policing Team.
- f. In addition to face-to-face training, the team provided resources including signposting to the Department of Education and Educate Against Hate materials, which were distributed to designated safeguarding leads across all schools.
- g. The importance of the 'Don't Disrespect' campaign was acknowledged, it had been shaped by young people and supported by Kent Youth County Council. The campaign work had continued with posters distributed to all secondary schools in Kent at the start of the academic year to highlight healthy and unhealthy relationships and signpost support services. A resource pack had been provided to teachers to support PSHE lessons and a focused newsletter had been sent to schools directing them to the Kent and Medway Domestic Abuse Services website. It was explained that further campaign activity would be developed in collaboration with the council's advisor over the coming year.
- h. Superintendent Steenhuis explained that 'Walk and Talk' events had been held to identify areas where communities felt unsafe, enabling joint problem solving with local authorities on issues such as lighting and overgrown hedges. Additionally, events had been advertised online allowing residents to find their local beat officers. Project Vigilant had been implemented to covertly target predatory behaviour with trained officers deploying community to identify this behaviour. Home Office

Grip funding had also been provided for high visibility patrols. Educational resources and workshops on domestic abuse and healthy relationships had been delivered in schools, through the Police Education Programme with peer champions also established.

- i. 'Safer' Campaigns had been run across Kent each year, informed by intelligence collected from the previous year in order to allocate resources effectively. The Government had also launched national 'Safer Campaigns' including the recent Safer Summer Campaign focused on town centres, with a Safer Winter Campaign forthcoming. Local resourcing had been aligned with Government data, these campaigns were set to continue.
- j. It was explained that resources had been allocated based on demand through the Tasking and Coordination Group, using threat, risk and harm assessments. Chief Inspectors had presented requests to Superintendents, who determined local resource allocations. Where needs exceeded divisional capability, matters were escalated to the Tasking and Coordination Group, where the Deputy Chief Constable approved additional support from other policing units.
- k. Training was driven by the Counter Terrorism Local Profile which was produced by Counter Terrorism Policing. The profile outlined the threats and risk faced by Kent and Medway, the annual training was focused on the specific threats found in the profile.
- l. When asked about the levels of Nitrous Oxide use, Superintendent Steenhuis explained that there was a low level of detections due to the covert nature of the use of the drug, which often occurred behind closed doors. Where the Police could identify offenders, they were prosecuted. Alongside enforcement, efforts had focused on diversion and education, particularly through schools, in an effort to tackle the online purchasing of these substances. Work was done with the young people's service 'We Are With You' on school engagement, engaging with young people about the dangers of substance use and looking for alternative activities. It was acknowledged that much of the activity around these substances was hidden and occurred online, making it challenging to address and difficult to provide accurate figures as to the levels of usage.
- m. Work around prevention of substance misuse was intelligence led, with reports directed to local beat officers, who developed problem solving plans to address the issue. All problem solving activities had been recorded on Problem Solving Plans (PSPs) within the Athena Database. This allowed local officers to access information and respond effectively to identified issues, ensuring a coordinated approach. This process formed a part of the new Neighbourhood Policing Model, which had already shown positive impact.
- n. When asked about the suicide rate being higher than national average in Kent, Superintendent Steenhuis explained that suicide rates in Kent were complex, with men aged over 45 predominantly affected due to stress and communication barriers. While self harm rates were similar across genders, men completed suicide attempts more frequently. Local research had identified domestic abuse as a significant factor increasing suicide rates for women. Financial stress, relationship breakdowns and substance abuse were also recognised as key national drivers. The need for targeted mental health support and the

understanding of demographic specific risk factors was emphasised. Superintendent Steenhuis expressed his appreciation for the mental health services across Kent, including the ICB which had 24/7 safe havens and a 24/7 hotline, for police and ambulance services to access advice from Mental Health Clinicians when dealing with individuals in mental distress.

- o. Ms Mookerjee, Consultant in Public Health, shared that the need for alcohol treatment remained high due to the complexity of addiction and individuals being at varying stages of help seeking. Services were available for those ready to engage, for drugs such as heroin and crack cocaine, the service provision was generally sufficient but it was recognised that more outreach was needed. Funding reductions over the past 15 years had limited outreach services but through government uplifts, the resources were restored enabling services to proactively engage with individuals where needed.
- p. It was reported that fraud remained a significant crime with efforts focused on providing guidance through community channels and educating the public to distinguish legitimate contracts from scams. Trading standards targeted fraud affecting older and vulnerable people, with dedicated teams supporting victims and preventing repeat incidents. Local health alliance and voluntary sector partners had also contributed to community support and fraud prevention.
- q. Low level local issues had been addressed using offender reoffending data, including a focus on the top 20 retail offenders. Multi-agency work through the Kent Criminal Justice Board and Integrated Offender Management had monitored individuals released from prison to ensure access to support services. Repeat offenders and repeat victims, including in cases of anti-social behaviour, had been targeted with tailored interventions to reduce reoffending and prevent further victimisation.
- r. Mr Peerbux explained within the partnership consideration was being given to analytical resources. The Kent Community Safety Team had planned to recruit an analyst to assist in the development of a dashboard. A senior officer level working group, which included all the agencies had been monitoring performance.
- s. Superintendent Steenhuis confirmed that Neighbourhood Officers were assigned covering multiple areas and were supported by task forces with additional resources. Visibility was highlighted as a challenge, efforts had been made to improve communication through 'My Community Voice' and corporate communications including social media podcasts and video updates to highlight work and engagement with local communities.
- t. It was reported that online harassment had a serious impact on mental health. Individuals were encouraged to report incidents, which were investigated, and where criminal, prosecuted. Efforts had also focused on raising awareness about online safety measures to prevent harm.
- u. Year 6 transition activities had been delivered to prepare pupils for secondary school, the team had engaged with primary schools and delivered safety sessions to this year group across the country. Staff had provided training to Virtual School Kent and received positive feedback for their support of vulnerable children.

- v. Collaboration had taken place between KCC Social Services and Integrated Children's Services to develop domestic abuse practice and adopt a strength based approach. This work had been carried out through the Early Intervention and Prevention Subgroup which had played a key role in the Domestic Abuse Strategy.
 - w. Partnership priorities were addressed in no particular order, resources had been flexibly allocated to support these priorities as needed.
 - x. Data collection faced challenges due to under reporting across many categories. The Crime Survey for England and Wales provided insights based on the surveyed experiences rather than reported incidents.
 - y. Ward-level surveys were conducted via My Community Voice and Officers used the data to understand local issues. It was explained that survey results have provided useful insights into priorities such as e-scooters, parking and fly-tipping. Additionally, surveys from various organisations had been consolidated to provide a comprehensive picture for the partnership.
5. Following the questions, the Chairman welcomed comments and views from the Committee about the report. These included:
- a. The importance of addressing threats from both the far right and the far left. In response to this a Member stressed the importance of allowing the professionals to manage the risks through their assessment process.
 - b. Every child in Kent schools be provided with an education on preventing domestic abuse, misogyny and promoting healthy relationships. Additionally, teaching children critical thinking, to understand the risks of certain online material, in an effort to prevent radicalisation.
 - c. To encourage the take up of resources aimed at reducing suicide levels in Kent.
 - d. To make more funding available for outreach work.
 - e. Using more positive language and outcomes within the report. In response to this a Member highlighted the presence of Prevent Officers within schools and that Prevent was a part of safeguarding training for teachers and governors.
 - f. A Member discussed the dashboard coming back to the Committee once developed to then discuss how it could be more visible to the public.
 - g. To discuss how the visibility of neighbourhood policing could be more closely monitored.
 - h. The importance of including Neighbourhood watch groups in the partnership to increase visibility and confidence.
6. In summary Mrs Lawes, Deputy Cabinet Member for Communities, explained that a balanced approach was needed in all initiatives. Mrs Lawes expressed concern about the number of programmes being delivered in primary schools and the potential impact on young children's education and wellbeing by introducing issues too early.
7. Superintendent Steenhuis, explained that engagement with young people focused on year 6 transition activities and wider community initiatives including youth clubs and diversion work. Superintendent Steenhuis highlighted the

partnerships achievements including the nationally recognised Body Tag Scheme and the Knife Replacement Initiative for domestic abuse cases. Performance monitoring combined the use of dashboards with case studies to better showcase successful interventions. Additionally, measures had been introduced to manage officer obstruction rates and protect neighbourhood visibility. The new one-click share feature on My Community Voice had improved information sharing and efforts were underway to strengthen links with Neighbourhood Watch through online platforms to enhance communication and community reach.

8. Mr Wilkinson, Assistant Director Contest and Serious Organised Crime, added that Prevent was one of the four elements of Contest, UK Counter Terrorism Strategy that had been in place since 2005. Whilst examples of misunderstanding around some terminology was acknowledged as a challenge, the importance of ongoing dialogue to improve clarity was emphasised.
9. Ms Mookerjee explained that Public Health played an important role in crime prevention and community safety focusing on prevention through health creation and building social cohesion. Strengthening community connections was highlighted as an effective way to support mental wellbeing, local health alliances, voluntary sector partners and Neighbourhood Watch were actively involved in this work. Improved access to services and a more proactive outreach or identified as current priorities to create healthier and safer communities.
10. Superintendent Steenhuis added that integration between Neighbourhood Watch, My Community Voice and doorbell footage had supported crime investigations. A digital asset management link had been used to request relevant footage from residents, which saved police time and helped to bring offenders to justice. This approach had successfully mobilised communities through technology.
11. A Member added that while protecting younger children was important, early intervention was necessary as young people were increasingly exposed to risks through social media and online gaming.
12. The Chair proposed and Mr Eustace seconded the following recommendation that:
13. The Scrutiny Committee note the report and offer sincere thanks to the partners for their work and their contributions to the report.
14. In noting the report the Scrutiny Committee identified the following points for consideration for the return of this report in July 2026:
 - a. How communications had been improved with the public and with services outside of the partnership.
 - b. How monitoring through the dashboard had progressed and how public confidence in the data within the report could be assured.

The Committee also noted five areas that remained of interest:

- a. The visibility of neighbourhood policing.

- b. The outreach from services into communities.
- c. Access to suicide prevention services.
- d. How best practice could be rolled out from individual parts of the partnership that were performing extremely well across the county.
- e. How the Neighbourhood Watch might be included in any future reports.

RESOLVED that the Scrutiny Committee note the report and offer sincere thanks to the partners for their work and their contributions to the report.