DARTFORD BOROUGH COUNCIL

CRIME AND DISORDER (OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY) COMMITTEE

MINUTES of the meeting of the Crime and Disorder (Overview and Scrutiny) Committee held on Wednesday 26 January 2011.

PRESENT: Councillor A Bardoe (Chairman)
Councillor M J Davis (Vice-Chairman)
Councillor M J Bryant
Councillor A R Lloyd
Councillor G T Prout
Councillor P J Scanlan
Councillor I D Armitt JP (Substitute for Councillor D E Hunnisett)

ABSENT: Councillor D E Hunnisett

Dartford Borough Council Officers:

Sheri Green – Strategic Director
Matt Roberts – CSO/CSU
Colin Newmarch – SEO/CSU
Paul Woodfield – CCTV Manager

CABINET MEMBERS: Councillor Mrs Ann Allen, portfolio holder for Anti-Social Behaviour and Community Safety, at the invitation of the Committee

ALSO PRESENT TO RESPOND TO ISSUES RAISED BY THE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE:

Temp./Ch Supt. Ali – Acting Area Commander, Kent Police
Ch. Insp. Philip Painter – Kent Police
Insp. Peter Dale – Kent Police / CSU

15. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor D E Hunnisett.

The Chairman welcomed Temporary Chief Superintendent Ali Roden, Acting Area Commander to the meeting and her Kent Police colleagues Chief Inspector Philip Painter and Inspector Peter Dale.

16. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST
Councillor I D Armitt JP (substituting for Counsellor D E Hunnisett), declared a personal interest in most of the agenda items, given his role as a sitting Magistrate on the North Kent Bench.

17. CONFIRMATION OF THE MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 23 JUNE 2010

RESOLVED:

That the Minutes of the meeting held on 23 June 2010 be confirmed as accurate.

18. URGENT ITEMS

There were no items for urgent consideration.

19. TO CONSIDER REFERENCES FROM OTHER COMMITTEES (IF ANY)

There were no references from other Committees.

20. COUNCILLOR CALL FOR ACTION (CCFA)

There were no Councillor Calls for Action (CCfA) for consideration.

21. CHAIRMAN’S UPDATE

At the suggestion of the Chairman, Members agreed to take Item 12 – “Update on the Policing of the Town Centre”, immediately after Items 8 and 9 to allow Kent Police colleagues attending to resume their operational duties as soon as possible.

22. FORWARD PLAN

Members noted the contents of the Forward Plan for the period 1 January 2011 to 30 April 2011.

23. CROSS - BORDER POLICING WITH ESSEX AND METROPOLITAN FORCES (DRAW-DOWN)

The Acting Area Commander was invited to update Members on current arrangements for cross-border policing between the Kent, Metropolitan and Essex forces.

Ch. Supt. Roden advised Members that cross-border cooperation with the Metropolitan and Essex police forces had been ongoing for some 2 years. Regular overview meetings were held with Metropolitan colleagues from Bexley, whilst collaboration with Essex colleagues was more comprehensive and being taken forward under the terms of a joint protocol signed in 2007. Cross – border operations with Essex police were led jointly by a Kent
Assistant Chief Constable and a Chief Superintendent from the Essex force. It was the first such national initiative to be undertaken in England and Wales and was serving North Kent well.

The Acting Area Commander explained that collaboration with the Essex force concentrated on the major areas of Serious Crime, Forensics and Intelligence, with a Superintendent in charge of each operational area. Essex police colleagues were in the process of co-locating to North Fleet police station in Kent, to further enhance the joint working relationship. Examples of joint operations with Essex police included: cooperation with Thurrock police over Bluewater operations; combating HGV thefts plus a major push to combat “car creeper” crime – whereby criminals, primarily from Essex, make reconnaissance trips to North Kent to identify high quality vehicles before returning to burglarize the car owner’s homes for the keys and driving off the targeted vehicles undamaged on car transporters.

Members relayed the following personal and anecdotal evidence of perceived cross-border crime issues in their Wards:

- Bexley Park residents in the Joydens Wood Ward were frequently referred to the Metropolitan Police in error, when making 999 calls to Kent Police’s Force Control Centre (FCC);
- Joydens Wood residents in general had expressed concern over the apparent division of responsibility for the investigation of burglaries between Kent Police (houses) and the Met force (garden sheds);
- Joydens Wood residents also reported high levels of Anti-Social Behaviour (ASB) and other low-level crime from teenagers entering the Ward via the 96 bus route – so called “oyster card” crime. The perception was that the teenagers were able to return to the Metropolitan area, again by 96 bus, before Kent police could respond;
- Councillor Mrs Allen (Joydens Wood Ward and KCC), Cabinet portfolio holder for ASB and Community Safety said that some KCC Highway funds might be made available for minor projects to combat low-level crime;
- Heath Ward residents continued to complain of regular incidents of car theft and associated vehicle crime, and illegal behaviour using vehicles on Dartford Heath. The Friends of Dartford Heath and the Heath Ward PACT were working together to monitor the illegal activity and feedback information to Kent Police.
- It was argued that CCTV cameras situated on Dartford Heath and at the A2 junction with the M25 would act as a visual deterrent to criminals, including those entering Dartford from the Metropolitan area;

Police and CSU officers made the following points in response to Members concerns:

- Kent Police would advise the FCC that Bexley Park lay within the Joydens Wood Ward in Kent and was not the responsibility of the Met;
- Kent Police systems differentiate between addresses in Kent and the Met area. Examples of where there has been a problem brought to the
attention of Members could be most usefully fed into the review process via Inspector Dale in the CSU;

- Kent police were aware of the ready access and egress the 96 bus route provided to teenagers and others intent on visiting Dartford for criminal purposes. The topic featured in the strategic discussions held with Met colleagues. ASB in Bexley Park had been successfully tackled in the past by the temporary deployment of ‘Stryker’ mobile CCTV cameras;
- Additional permanent CCTV cameras in Dartford would require capital funding which was not feasible in the current economic climate. However, the Council’s 3 ‘Stryker’ mobile cameras were deployed to “crime hotspots” on the basis of identified need. Consistently reporting crime was essential to help identify need and consider the re-deployment of existing resources;
- The installation of a cycle path across the Heath by KCC appeared to have helped to deter some of the more public displays of anti-social behaviour in the area;
- Kent Police’s Tactical Team regularly pursued known criminal elements into the Metropolitan area, either to make arrests under agreed cross-border protocols, or to warn identified criminals that they were under surveillance and not to return to Kent. Met officers pursued Kent criminals under the same arrangements;
- The Bexley / North Kent border and the A2 junction with the M25 at Dartford Heath in particular were the focus for joint operations targeting petty criminals. Joint operations at the Dartford Crossing and Tunnel between the Kent and Essex forces, HMRC and the UK Border Agency had also proved particularly effective;
- Staffs from Dartford’s Community Safety Unit (CSU) have been meeting with equivalent staff at Bexley and Greenwich Councils, together with Kent and Metropolitan police colleagues. Strategic discussions are held on a Quarterly basis and operational information exchanged on a regular basis in the interim.

RESOLVED:

1) That the Police’s Force Control Centre (FCC) be advised that Bexley Park is in Kent and callers reporting crimes from that area should be dealt with by Kent police rather than the Met;
2) That CSU officers advise Councillor Allen, Cabinet portfolio holder for ASB and Community Welfare, of any minor projects that would benefit from limited KCC Highways funding;
3) That the Acting Area Commander provides the Committee with details of projected savings as a result of joint working with Essex police;
4) That details of Operation Eclipse be advised to Heath Ward Members.

24. PACT / NEIGHBOURHOOD PANELS INCLUDING COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT (WORK PLAN ITEM)

Chief Inspector Painter updated Members on the new arrangements governing PACT meetings following the change of Government in May 2010.
He explained that under the previous Administration, PACT meetings had been held monthly and were designated as the primary vehicle for the public to engage with the police. PACT meetings had also been used in the past to support the National Indicator (N.I.), and gauge public confidence in police performance. This was no longer the case.

The new Coalition Government favoured a greater police presence on the streets, engaging with the public on a daily basis. PACT meetings had been reduced to a quarterly function, with police forces also encouraged to identify more effective and better attended forums to engage with the public. The recent collaboration between the Heath PACT and the Friends of Dartford Heath was a good example. As part of the gradual change towards greater interaction with the public, Kent Police had surveyed 8,500 residents using a BlackBerry questionnaire.

Members agreed that in their experience PACT meetings had been poorly attended, despite good police reports and presentations. Lack of adequate publicity was seen as a contributory factor, but in general terms, the PACT process had not produced positive results.

Members welcomed the new emphasis on increased engagement with the public through an enhanced police presence on the streets via the Neighbourhood Policing Team network. A higher police profile in the Wards would help raise public confidence and a positive perception of effective police performance. Improved publicity for the quarterly PACT meetings, plus regular electronic updates to Members on crime statistics for inclusion in Ward Newsletters, would also help.

The Acting Area Commander assured Members that the new Chief Constable for Kent fully supported the Coalition Government’s initiative towards Neighbourhood Policing, based on an enhanced police presence inter-acting with the public on a daily basis. She added that the new operational measures were due to be considered by the Kent Police Authority on 9 February 2011.

The Chairman advised Members that he had encountered a divergence of opinion over the Coalition Government’s new proposals for community policing at a police conference in December 2010. He suspected that any benefits from the proposed new measures would need 2-3 years to take effect.

In further final discussion, it was confirmed for Members that Kent Police were aware of the 3 Wards in the Borough experiencing the highest levels of ASB and that Neighbourhood Policing resources were being deployed as effectively as possible to combat these crime “hotspots”. However, it was also necessary to ensure that all Wards retained a consistent police presence, to better build community relationships.

RESOLVED:
1) That use of the CSU website to advertise future quarterly PACT meetings be investigated;
2) That the present arrangements for the delivery of PACT flyers be reviewed;
3) That the CSU website be updated to include results of Operation Horizon;
4) That Members be advised of the 6 week rota for Horizon with a reminder 1 week in advance of the Operation visiting their Ward.

25. POLICING OF THE TOWN CENTRE: UPDATE FROM KENT POLICE (EXEMPT CATEGORY SO 46 (1)(B) ANNEX 1 PARAGRAPH 7)

The Acting Area Commander updated Members on the new strategies and resources being deployed to police the Town Centre and exit routes during the operating hours of the Night Time Economy (Item B in the Exempt Agenda) and responded to Members questions.

In subsequent related discussion, the Strategic Director advised Members that funding for the Grabbacab scheme was secured for the next 6 months and that further funding for Grabbacab was being pursued with Kent Police and KCC Health officials. She further commented that long-term sustainable funding was not currently available but had hopes that the Government might introduce legislation allowing Council’s to levy on late night establishments to fund community safety initiatives.

The Acting Area Commander added that Kent Police were considering using a mobile police station vehicle, deployed in the Town Centre, as a ‘Safe Place’ facility for distressed members of the public or those perceived to be at risk;

RESOLVED:

1. That CSU staff pursue with the Street Pastor Organisation the possibility of setting up a ‘Safe Place Scheme’ with the aid of funding from town centre church’s and possibly the local PCT;
2. That CSU staff consider the re-deployment of a ‘Stryker’ mobile CCTV camera along Dartford Road in West Hill;
3. That effective policing of the exit routes from the Town Centre where the majority of the Dartford population resided was crucial in terms of community wellbeing and public perception of efficient police performance.

26. CCTV : ANNUAL UPDATE (WORK PLAN ITEM)

The following points were confirmed for Members by the Strategic Director and CSU officers present:
CRIME AND DISORDER (OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY) COMMITTEE

WEDNESDAY 26 JANUARY 2011

- Existing CCTV cameras were replaced at a rate of 4 to 5 per year on the basis of a rolling programme that was 50% towards completion;
- DBC owned a total of 54 permanently installed CCTV cameras of which 44 were strategically placed in the Town Centre. The rolling replacement programme also contained an element for camera repairs;
- The siting of CCTV cameras in Dartford was based on need and crime analysis carried out in the past. Some crime patterns had changed on the margins of those areas with CCTV installations, but they remained the areas of highest crime concentrations and therefore continued need;
- The Council’s new mobile ‘Stryker’ CCTV cameras had been funded by the Dartford and Gravesham CSP (CDRP as was), in the absence of any further capital funding from central government for additional CCTV installations. In the current economic climate further capital funding was unlikely.
- It was confirmed that deployment of the mobile ‘Stryker’ CCTV cameras to fresh crime “hotspots” was made on the basis of reported crime and ASB. It was therefore essential that residents consistently reported crime in their area to enable CSU staff to make informed decisions and re-deploy resources accordingly.

RESOLVED:

1. That the Committee note the contents of the report and Appendices.

27. DARTFORD AND GRAVESHAM COMMUNITY SAFETY PARTNERSHIP STRATEGIC ASSESSMENT (SA): PART I EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Community Safety Officer informed Members that the Dartford and Gravesham Community Safety Partnership (CSP) had signed-off the Strategic Assessment (SA) document without amendment at their meeting on 17 January 2011.

He confirmed that subject to public consultation, the priorities identified in the SA document would now be used to develop the new Community Safety Plan.

Members welcomed the headline figures in the SA which recorded an overall reduction in crime for Dartford of -6.4% for the period October 2009 to September 2010 compared to the corresponding period in 2008/09.

Detailed discussion of the Executive Summary and In-Depth Analysis sections of the SA document were conducted by the Committee in subsequent closed session.

RESOLVED:
1. That the Committee note the contents of the Strategic Assessment as adopted by the Dartford and Gravesham CSP meeting of 17 January 2011;
2. That the Committee endorse the priorities identified by the Strategic Assessment (SA) subject to public consultation;
3. That the Committee endorse the proposal to develop a new Community Safety Plan to address the priorities identified in the SA and to submit the draft Plan to the next meeting of the CSP.

28. EXCLUSION OF THE PRESS AND PUBLIC

RESOLVED:

That under Section 100A(4) of the Local Government Act 1972 (as amended), the press and public be excluded from the meeting for the following item of business on the grounds that involves the likely disclosure of exempt information.

29. DARTFORD AND GRAVESHAM COMMUNITY SAFETY PARTNERSHIP STRATEGIC ASSESSMENT (SA) PART II (EXEMPT CATEGORY SO 46(1)(B) ANNEX 1 PARAGRAPH 7)

Following confirmation that no members or the Press or Public were present, the Committee went into closed session to consider Item A of the Exempt Agenda - Strategic Assessment (SA) 2010 Part II: In-depth Analysis.

Members, assisted by officers and representatives from Kent Police undertook a detailed discussion of the In-depth Analysis material, concentrating in particular on the areas of Anti-Social Behaviour (ASB), Bluewater (Shoplifting), Domestic Violence, Violent Crime and Youth Re-offending / Referral Orders.

Following discussion Members requested that Officers and Kent Police provide the Committee, where possible with any further analysis of and background to the specific areas discussed.

At the conclusion of proceedings, the Chairman thanked Kent Police representatives, the Strategic Director and CSU officers for attending and congratulated the CSP and partner agencies for achieving a significant overall reduction in crime in the Borough for the period under review.

The meeting closed at 9.40 pm

Councillor A Bardoe
CHAIRMAN