

Minutes

Overview and Scrutiny Committee



1st September 2010

Councillors	Present	Councillors	Present
J. Baugh	Apologies	A. M. Meyer	Yes
G. Cohen	Yes	R. Ramage	Yes
M. Dunn	Yes	D. E. A. Rice	Yes
Dr. R. L. Evans	Yes	A. F. Shelton	Yes
M. Gage (Chairman)	Yes	Mrs. J. Smith	Yes
J. E. B. Gyford	Yes	F. Swallow	Apologies

The following representatives of the Community Safety Partnership were also in attendance:-

Stephen Nicholas, Chairman of the Community Safety Partnership
Charmaine Dean, Head of Community Services
Helena Goodwin, Community Services Manager

Cllr. Mrs. W. Schmitt, Portfolio Holder for Clean, Green and Safe was also in attendance.

21. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

INFORMATION: There were no interests declared.

22. MINUTES

DECISION: That the minutes of the meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 14th July 2010 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

23. QUESTION TIME

INFORMATION: There were no questions asked or statements made.

24. SCRUTINY OF CRIME AND DISORDER MATTERS

As crime and disorder scrutiny is a new mandatory function of the Committee, it had been agreed at the meeting on 2nd June 2010 that representatives of the Community Safety Partnership (CSP) be invited to attend this meeting of the Committee to give a presentation on:-

- What the partnership is;
- How it operates;
- What are the main areas of work;

- What are the current key activities.

The Committee received the following documents in advance of the meeting:-

- The CSP's Terms of Reference;
- Introductory information from the Council's web site about the CSP;
- Home Office Guidance for the scrutiny of crime and disorder matters.

Cllr. Gage the Chairman welcomed Stephen Nicholas, Chairman of the Community Safety Partnership, Charmaine Dean, Head of Community Services and Helena Goodwin, Community Services Manager, to the meeting.

Stephen Nicholas the Chairman of the CSP gave a brief introduction. He was an independent member of the Essex Police Authority which is a statutory member of the CSP, and Braintree District was his particular focus. He had served on the CSP for a period of time and had subsequently been elected to serve as its Chairman. He thanked the Committee for inviting CSP representatives to attend, and advised the Committee that whilst they would be given a lot of information tonight there would be ample opportunity for Members to ask questions.

Charmaine Dean commenced the powerpoint presentation by giving an overview of the position based on information from iQuanta (Home Office database for monitoring police performance) showing how the District compared favourably with its 'family group' of similar sized authorities, how Essex compared favourably with other counties, how Braintree District compared favourably with other local authorities in Essex, as regards crime and disorder issues.

Helena Goodwin then took the Committee through the main detailed presentation.

A copy of the powerpoint presentation is appended to these minutes.

The CSP representatives answered members questions during the course of the presentations and during a question and answer session that followed.

A summary of the question and answer session is set out below.

Question by Cllr. A. Shelton

Who is on the Road Safety Panel for Braintree District?

Answer by Helena Goodwin

It is chaired by the Lead Member from Essex County Council and there are representatives from the District Council, the Police and the community.

Question by Cllr. A. Meyer

What consultations have you been carrying out with the public over the past years and what do you do with the feedback that you receive from the public consultation process?

What have been the outcomes?

Answer by Helena Goodwin

The Home Office has recently launched a consultation paper called 'Policing in the 21st Century' which includes a focus on reconnecting with the public. The CSP has compiled its response to the consultation paper which will be submitted to the Local Strategic Partnership, and it may also be considered by the Cabinet and the Council's Management Board.

The requirement to consult with members of the public came into force last year and the CSP consulted just under 8000 people – young people through to seniors – using various methods of consultation.

The results of the consultation are fed into the strategic assessment and are used to help identify the CSPs strategic priorities.

The performance of the CSP is measured through the crime statistic figures for the District.

Answer by Stephen Nicholas

The organisational chart for the CSP and the number of different groups involved, indicates that the structure is very complex and it has occurred to me as to whether the structure could be rationalised. However, two of the problems that we face is that Government has continually amended the structure of CSPs and added further layers. The legislation that sets out the role and functions of CSPs is substantial. All of the different partnerships are required by the legislation to consult. In the past, I feel that consultation has not been as 'joined up' as we would have liked. Going forward, we may have an opportunity to improve on that. In the past, each individual agency has undertaken consultation which has been fed into the CSP, but it has all been rather piece meal.

Crime and disorder matters are quite complex issues which do cut across multiple partnerships – the different partners form different groups to deal with particular types of problem such as anti-social behaviour. It works fairly well in my experience, but it could work better and be streamlined.

Question by Cllr. A. Meyer

Where do the crime statistics come from - how accurate are they, particularly the police statistics?

Answer by Helena Goodwin

The statistics come from the government, the LAA targets, the British Crime Survey and the Police.

Answer by Stephen Nicholas

Two of the main sources of statistics are the British Crime Survey (conducted by the government) and the Police force themselves through IQUANTA. I cannot speak for the accuracy of the British Crime Survey although I have no reason to believe that it is inaccurate. The statistics provided by the Police are provided within a set of rules that are laid down by the National Police Improvement Agency and the Home Office. I believe from the amount of scrutiny and audit of the records that are used that they are extremely

accurate given the guidelines and rules that are required to be followed. One can argue that some of the categories and rules might be different, but I believe the figures are accurate within those rules.

All of the information that is gathered through consultation is fed into the Strategic Assessment and from that into the priorities that are set locally. The CSP and the Police both work from two main sets of inputs – local priorities set by local people, and national priorities set by the government. The Police, for example, carried out a major telephone survey of residents earlier this year. They do collate all the information from the Neighbourhood Action Panels (NAPs) and the priorities from all of those are brought together, analysed centrally and fed into the annual Policing Plan which sets the targets and priorities for the coming year. I believe most of our partners work on a similar basis. I have no doubt that the process could be improved and that we could manage it better and integrate the information gathering and the information usage. However, the consultations are analysed, they do inform the priorities and the targets that are set.

In my experience, residents priorities do not change that much. For instance, at NAPs, local peoples priorities are speeding traffic, parking, anti-social behaviour, dog fouling – and I believe that shows we are addressing the right issues.

Question by Cllr. A. Shelton

Are you happy that the current community consultation and the outcomes of that consultation is reflective across the whole of Braintree District?

Answer by Stephen Nicholas

Geographically, I can only speak in detail for the Police and the answer in that respect is yes, because the Police undertook a professional consultation exercise – not just a random sample, but a stratified sample so that it covered a representative number of people in each District split between urban and rural.

There are some areas where I feel that it could be improved. There are some communities that we do not reach as well as we could eg the east european community in Braintree District.

Question by Cllr. M. Dunn

Do the Police feel that this form of partnership working impedes or helps them?

Answer by Stephen Nicholas

It does help, but it could be made very much better. It helps because crime and disorder are multi-faceted problems and we do have to work in partnership to resolve those problems. Any opportunity to work in partnership is therefore beneficial and the Police and the Police Authority would see it as beneficial.

Helena's presentation listed the legislation that we have to abide by, and she also showed other slides that showed influences from the Local Area Agreement, for example, and the list of local and national indicators that we are obliged to report against. There are also national and county priority areas that are set. That complexity does lead to bureaucracy, and bureaucracy often does lead to inefficiencies and a slowdown in decision and action taking.

We have two opportunities at the moment. The new coalition government has made a commitment to reduce some of the centrally set targets which will give us more local discretion and enable us to focus better on priorities.

The other opportunity is the advent of crime and disorder scrutiny. We would welcome any assistance that we can get as a CSP in cutting through some of that bureaucracy to help us to focus on local priorities, and in getting constructive feedback from the Overview and Scrutiny Committee on how we work. That is an opportunity for us to improve and we all know that there are areas where we could improve.

Cllr. G. Cohen

The issue of the Community Payback Scheme has been raised with me at grass roots level, are you able to provide any details of how this scheme works?

Answer by Helena Goodwin

The Community Payback Scheme is something that we work on in liaison with the Probation Service. Offenders carry out work on projects as part of their Unpaid Work sentence.

Answer by Cllr. Mrs. W. Schmitt

As regards the Community Payback Scheme, I would remind members that every time I report to Council on my portfolio, I comment on Community Payback and remind members to notify myself or Helena if they have any projects within their wards that could be undertaken as part of this scheme.

Question by Cllr. A. Meyer

How much impact has the watering down of real crimes in the term 'anti social behaviour' had in relation to the "fiddling" of crime figures?

Answer by Stephen Nicholas

I do not believe there has been any "fiddling" or that the figures attempt to portray the picture better than what it is. One can certainly argue about the terminology that is used to describe crimes and anti-social behaviour. I do not feel there has been any attempt by local partners including shire police forces or Police Authorities to manipulate the figures or to present them in any way other than to present them as a true and fair picture. If you want to comment on statements made by central government politicians, that is outside my area of competence.

Question by Cllr. A. Shelton

How frequently does the CSP meet and what inputs does it take from NAPs?

Answer by Helena Goodwin

The Responsible Authorities Group meets between 6 and 8 times a year. The thematic groups meet on a quarterly basis and the NAPs report to the relevant Area Joint Action Group on a monthly basis.

Question by Cllr. A. Shelton

How do you provide information back out to the community?

Answer by Helena Goodwin

The Chairs of the NAPs go to the relevant Joint Action Group and that would then be fed back. If the Chair of the NAP is unable to attend the meeting the local Police Community Support Officer or Neighbourhood Specialist Officer is normally present and can feed back through the NAP meeting.

Answer by Stephen Nicholas

The Essex Police web site also contains a lot of information about each of the neighbourhood policing teams including the priorities that have been fed back through the NAPs. The way in which NAPs work varies considerably across the County and even from one neighbouring district to another, and it is the subject of a current review as to how best to use NAPs, but no proposals have been put forward yet.

In terms of feeding information back, not only is information fed back through the NAPs, but the Essex Criminal Justice Board (ECJB) is responsible through its partners for feeding back to the public information on sentencing. So there will be more information fed back probably through the ECJB web site, and probably also through the neighbourhood sections of the Essex Police web site on sentencing because the government feels that the public likes and needs to see that justice is being done, and people who are actually caught are given appropriate sentences.

Question by Cllr. Dr. R. Evans

What are the current key activities of the CSP, and how are these decided and what consultative process is followed in determining them?

Answer by Helena Goodwin

The Responsible Authority Group is responsible for determining the CSPs Strategic Priorities taking into account the information gained through the annual Strategic Assessment for the District, and to determine how they are going to meet those priorities and what resources are going to be allocated to achieve them.

Question by Cllr. D. Rice

What information is given to the public on crime solving statistics? Do the public have an effective voice in helping to solve crime?

Answer by Stephen Nicholas

The term used within the Police is sanction detection rate, but it means the percentage of crimes for which someone is charged, summonsed, receives a caution or other formal sanction.

The figures, broken down into different categories of crime, are publicly available on the Essex Police web site. I would be more than happy to attend a future meeting of the

Committee with one of my colleagues from Braintree Police to discuss the figures for Braintree District.

Answer by Helena Goodwin

I was carrying out a visit with two members of the public this afternoon concerning some issues within an area, and the local community has identified what they see as a way of resolving the problem. The local community, BDC and the local police are each taking a series of actions and are working together to resolve it.

It is essential that members of the public report problems as in the absence of basic information that a problem exists it is difficult for the relevant authorities to take action.

Answer by Cllr. Mrs. W. Schmitt

People can contact 'Crime-stoppers', they can telephone the police and can remain completely anonymous. NAPs are an excellent conduit for information from the public. People mention issues to local Councillors who pass on that information. The Police rely to a great extent on intelligence from the public, but unfortunately there are many members of the public who think that it is someone else's responsibility to report it.

I attended a meeting tonight with police representatives in one of the areas in Braintree that was the subject of one of the recent drug raids. The purpose of the meeting was for the Police to give feedback to local residents on what had happened, where the intelligence had come from and what had been done. Unfortunately, despite extensive leafleting of local households no members of the public had attended.

Question by Cllr. R. Ramage

Are NAPs sufficiently advertised?

Answer by Cllr. Mrs. W. Schmitt

They are as well publicised as is possible.

Answer by Helena Goodwin

NAPs are not actually managed by the CSP as such, but by the local Police, although information from NAPs does feed through the CSP route.

Cllr. A. Meyer

I feel that people are reluctant to report issues, because they do not feel that there will be any point. What are the tangible outcomes when people report issues, and from the work that is carried out?

Answer by Cllr. Mrs. W. Schmitt

As the slides indicate, we have one of the lowest crime and disorder rates in the country and that speaks for itself. We also have one of the highest detection rates in the country. It is accepted of course that any individual who is the victim of crime and disorder will not take comfort in the fact that it happened in a low crime area.

Faced with the complex structure of the CSP and the various changes that have been made by the Government over the years, do you feel that the time has come for representations to be made to government with a view to CSPs adopting a new model better suited to its and its communities needs?

Answer by Stephen Nicholas

If we were starting with a blank sheet of paper, the structure may well have been different. Feeding back to central government has, I believe, been tried on a number of occasions in the past to no avail.

I understand that the coalition government has pledged to reduce central interference and to allow more scope for areas, communities and partnerships to work in the way that best suits them. My hope is that they will genuinely allow us to work together to achieve a much more efficient structure which will enable us to be quicker, less bureaucratic, and more cost effective. That is not in any way to denigrate the work of the CSP as I feel over the years that a great deal of excellent work has been done and much achieved. We can always be better and I am hoping that the Government will provide the opportunity to enable us to do that.

At the conclusion of the session, Cllr. Gage, on behalf of the Committee, thanked Stephen Nicholas, Charmaine Dean, Helena Goodwin and Cllr. Mrs. Schmitt for attending tonight's meeting and for giving very helpful presentations and answering members questions.

Cllr. Mrs. W. Schmitt and the CSP representatives left the meeting at this point.

The Committee then went on to consider how to take the issue of crime and disorder scrutiny forward.

Members felt that they needed time to consider and digest all the information that they had received tonight.

DECISION

Following discussion, it was agreed as follows:-

1. A copy of the protocol (copy attached to these minutes) for carrying out crime and disorder scrutiny that had been agreed at the meeting of the Committee held on 2/6/10 and which set out the Committee's terms of reference would be circulated to Members;
2. It was also agreed to ask the CSP for a list of persons who attend each of the groups in the CSP structure chart;

Action Point: Steve Bore, Scrutiny Manager

3. Officers are to compile a discussion paper under the following headings:-

- Outcomes;

- Consultations and engagement with the public;
- Partnership structure;
- Crime and disorder statistics.

Action Point: Sharon Lowe, Assistant Chief Executive/Steve Bore, Scrutiny Manager

4. The Committee will give further consideration to this matter at one of its October meetings (this will be after the announcement of the government's Spending Review due on 20/10/10 when the impact of any government funding decisions in relation to the work of CSPs will be known).

25. SCRUTINY OF THE COUNCIL'S PROPOSED 2011/12 BUDGET

In respect of the three budget scrutiny sessions with representatives of the Cabinet, the Committee noted that Cllr. Walters would now attend the 27/10/10 session and Cllr. Mrs. Schmitt the 17/11/10 session.

The Scrutiny Manager confirmed that all members of the Cabinet had been written to and advised of the arrangements for budget scrutiny. This included the requirement for written responses to the set questions to be submitted by the relevant Portfolio holders in respect of the two latter sessions with Groups of Portfolio holders on 27/10/10 and 17/11/10 respectively.

Officers had also been advised of the documents (10 items in total) that the Committee requires in advance to facilitate scrutiny of the Cabinet's proposed budget.

DECISION: That the report be noted.

26. TASK AND FINISH GROUP

Cllr. R. Ramage the Chairman of the Public Services Provision for Older People Task and Finish Group gave a verbal update on progress. The Essex Fire Community Safety Officer had attended the last meeting and given a very useful and thorough presentation on the assistance/advice provided by the Fire Service for the elderly. Clare Lawrence from the Mid Essex Health Authority, who was on secondment with the Council, had also given an informative presentation on services for the elderly provided by the Health Authority. Arrangements were being made for a presentation from Greenfields Community Housing. The Group was approaching the end of its study and in due course will be drafting its final report and recommendations for submission to full Council and Cabinet.

DECISION: That the verbal report be noted.

27. DECISION PLANNER (FORMERLY KNOWN AS THE FORWARD PLAN) – 17/8/10 TO 16/12/10

Members received the four month Decision Planner for the above period.

DECISION: That the contents of the Forward Plan be received and noted.

The meeting closed at 9.05pm.

M. Gage
Chairman