

Minutes

Overview and Scrutiny Committee

23rd March 2011



Councillors	Present	Councillors	Present
J. Baugh	Yes	A. M. Meyer	Apologies
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	Apologies
J. E. B. Gyford	Yes	F. Swallow	Yes

District Commander Nick Lee was in attendance for item 5.

63. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

INFORMATION: There were no interests declared.

64. QUESTION TIME

There were no questions asked or statements made.

65. MINUTES

DECISION: That the minutes of the meeting held on 9th February 2011 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

66. SCRUTINY OF CRIME AND DISORDER MATTERS – PRESENTATION FROM COMMANDER NICK LEE ON KEY ISSUES AND CHALLENGES FACED BY THE POLICE IN DEALING WITH CRIME AND DISORDER ISSUES IN BRAINTREE DISTRICT

Cllr. Gage welcomed District Commander Nick Lee to the meeting.

Nick Lee then gave a powerpoint presentation to the Committee. A copy of the presentation is contained in the Appendix.

At the conclusion of the presentation there was a question and answer session which is summarised below.

Question by Cllr. G. Cohen

It has been reported that complaints against the police by the public in Essex have risen sharply in the last couple of years (as in some other places). It would be interesting to know why this is the case, what proportion of complaints are genuine, and what does this

rise signify (e.g. public attitudes, lower police effectiveness or standards, perhaps even greater police activity)?

Answer by Nick Lee

For the past 7 years, there has been a national trend for complaints against the police to rise. Members of the public are generally more aware of their right to complain and their expectations of police services increase year by year. Essex Police is an open organisation as regards complaints, and its complaints procedures are well publicised. People are encouraged to complain if they feel they have had a poor service. The number of complaints received by Essex Police has risen, but it is important to keep this in perspective given the number of calls and incidents handled by the police annually. Often, the police have to make difficult decisions and sometimes people feel aggrieved. At present, approximately 10% of complaints made against the police are justified. The majority of the justified complaints relate to relatively minor matters. However, with any justified complaint the police ensure that it learns any lessons and that it uses justified complaints as a means of improving the services it provides.

Question by Cllr. Dr. R. Evans

I would like to raise the following points about local Neighbourhood Action Panels (NAPS).

- a) mindful that NAPS have been in operation for a number of years could we have an update of the Terms of Reference of these NAPS in the light of experience gained?
- b) to what extent are Councillors – Town/Parish/District or County encouraged to sit on NAPS?
- c) what is the view from the Police perspective of NAPS in terms of dealing with community issues such as crime and anti-social behaviour?

Answer by Nick Lee

- a) It has been very difficult to get people to attend NAPS. The NAPS are mainly held in the evening. Attendance increases if there is a particular contentious issue in the community. Essex police has recently conducted a review of NAPS including a public consultation exercise, and is looking at, for example, the timing, location and venues for NAPS; whether they can be held as part of a Parish Council meeting. The chief officers of Essex Police will shortly be considering a number of recommendations arising from the review although the basic terms of reference are likely to remain.
- b) Councillors are very welcome to attend NAPS. Current guidelines indicate that Councillors should be discouraged from chairing NAPS, and that the Chair should be a member of the public;
- c) In my experience, NAPS are very effective in dealing with minor issues in relation to anti-social behaviour. I do not feel that NAPS are the appropriate forum for dealing with serious crime issues.

Question by Cllr. D. Rice

Do you have any problems with gang warfare in the District?

Answer by Nick Lee

We do not have an issue with organised gangs in Braintree District. There are criminals that loosely associate, but we do not have any problem with organised criminal gangs.

Question by Cllr. R. Ramage

As regards NAPS, I attend one of the Witham NAPs, but the attendance does not appear to change regardless of whether they are held in the daytime or evening. I feel there needs to be more publicity of times and venues. Would you comment?

Answer by Nick Lee

I will see what improvements can be made to the publicity aspects.

Question by Cllr. Dr. R. Evans

As regards the terms of reference for NAPs, do these vary from District to District. My understanding is that the Colchester NAPs allow all members of the Panels to remain whenever any confidential items are discussed subject to them signing a confidentiality agreement. In Braintree District, my experience is that Councillors are not permitted to remain in the meeting for the confidential items whilst other members of the public are permitted to do so?

Answer by Nick Lee

When NAPs were first established, their terms of reference and guidelines were very prescriptive. There has been an acceptance over the last couple of years that 'one size' does not fit all, and different areas may need to function in different ways.

Some NAPs operate on a completely open basis whilst others operate an open session and then a closed session.

I feel that if Councillors sign a confidentiality agreement then that should be sufficient to enable them to remain in the meeting for the confidential part of the meeting.

In this respect, I will speak to the Police Officers handling the Witham NAPs.

Question by Cllr. J. Baugh

(1) As regards the various categories of crime, do you have discretion to tackle whichever category of crime you feel is the most important or are you still subject to national targets in tackling specific types of crime?

(2) Early intervention in tackling crime is one of the current catchphrases, do you feel you have the resources/partnership working in place to make early intervention to stop the cycle of crime?

Answer by Nick Lee

(1) There is a robust performance framework that I am measured against and there are targets that I am required to achieve. Most of those targets are focused around serious crime, anti-social behaviour, and issues such as dwelling burglary. The targets generally

conform with the types of crime that we have problems with in the District. I do not feel that the targets constrain me from carrying out, for example, activity in drug enforcement issues. Crime reduction is a key target in respect of which I am accountable to the Chief Constable.

(2) We do have excellent links with all our partnership agencies. We have a significant intervention/liaison in schools with Police Officers running schemes such as “Crucial Crew”, and a significant input into youth clubs. We deal with offenders in the most appropriate way to stop the cycle of crime.

Question by Cllr. M. Dunn

Are you satisfied with the support that you receive from the Council’s Community Safety Section?

Answer by Nick Lee

Helena Goodwin the Council’s Community Services Manager, and her team provide me with an excellent service and contribute significantly to anti-social behaviour reduction, and are always on hand and willing to deal with crime issues. Braintree District Council is a key partner and agency and I would take the opportunity to thank the Council for its support.

Question by Cllr. A. Shelton

(1) In the rural areas, the local PCSO used to have a surgery in some of the villages and that was quite well received, but these have not happened for some time. Are they likely to be re-instated and perhaps tied in with NAPs?

(2) As regards Neighbourhood Watches in rural areas, there appears to be a concern from local people that there is not a sufficient police input into these?

Answer by Nick Lee

(1) and (2) There has been some sickness absence from the PCSO who covers the rural areas concerned. However, I will raise the subject of beat surgeries being possibly tied in with Parish Council NAPs, and also the issue regarding rural Neighbourhood Watches, and other rural policing issues with the Local Police Inspector.

Question by Cllr. R. Ramage

As regards computer related crime, is this a growing area of crime and what facilities do you have to deal with it?

Answer by Nick Lee

These normally cover child abuse crime, and computer based e-mail fraud scams.

In respect of the child abuse crime, there is a dedicated police team that deals with on-line child abuse.

As regards computer based fraud scams, there has been an increase in this type of crime particularly in the Halstead area. Some recent publicity has been undertaken to make the public more aware of suspect e-mails or telephone calls, and not to disclose confidential

and personal details of bank accounts, passwords etc.

At the conclusion of the question and answer session, there was a general consensus amongst Members that this had been an extremely useful meeting in providing further background information in connection with the Committee's responsibilities for scrutiny of crime and disorder matters. The Committee felt that Nick Lee had provided in some detail a particularly incisive presentation of key issues and challenges faced by the police in dealing with crime and disorder issues in the District, and members felt much more informed as a result.

Cllr. Gage thanked Nick Lee for attending tonight's meeting, and indicated that the presentation had helped members considerably in understanding the priorities of the police. It was clear that there was also an appreciation by the police of the Council's role. The Committee also understood how difficult it was for the police to marry up the public perception of what the police role should be, when taking forward police priorities.

Nick Lee left the meeting when this item had been dealt with.

67. OLDER PEOPLE TASK AND FINISH GROUP

DECISION: It was noted that the Cabinet Member for Housing and Well-Being will provide a detailed response and recommendations to the Cabinet meeting on 28/3/11, in relation to the recommendations of the Older People Task and Finish Group.

68. FUTURE SUPPORT ARRANGEMENTS FOR THE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

The Committee was advised that the arrangements for providing support to the Overview and Scrutiny function in the new civic year will be as follows:-

Activity	Responsibility
Attending meetings of the O and S Committee and providing advice and guidance.	Sharon Lowe, Assistant Chief Executive
Co-ordinating and taking all the necessary action to progress the Committee's annual work programme including drafting scrutiny final reports and setting up Scrutiny Steering Board.	Alastair Peace, Member Services Manager
Monitoring of progress of O and S recommendations.	Emma Wisbey, Governance Lawyer
Compiling reports on all O and S issues including new scrutiny legislation.	Sharon Lowe, Assistant Chief Executive
Preparation of Agenda and minutes.	Member Services Team
Liaison and maintaining an overview with the Chairman of the O and S Committee.	Sharon Lowe, Assistant Chief Executive

Members were also advised that a final report is due to be submitted to the Council's AGM

on 26/5/11 concerning the issue of whether to merge the functions of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee, Audit and Standards Committees, although initial research had not produced an overwhelming case for a Governance Committee.

DECISION:

Following discussion, it was agreed as follows:-

1. The new officer support arrangements for the O and S Committee be noted;
2. The monitoring of progress of O and S recommendations should include an assessment of the impact of those recommendations once they have been implemented.

In this respect and to assist the new Overview and Scrutiny Committee in understanding the scope and type of work that it will be undertaking, the Officers are to submit a report to the first meeting of the Committee following the Council's annual general meeting, setting out retrospectively the recommendations made by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee over the past four years and what outcomes have been achieved;

3. The Assistant Chief Executive is also to submit a discussion paper to this first meeting of the Committee concerning its terms of reference and its potential main areas of work given the challenges facing the Council over the next four years.

Action Point: Assistant Chief Executive with support from the new officer support team, to action as appropriate.

69. DECISION PLANNER – 14/2/11 TO 30/6/11

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

DECISION: that the contents of the Decision Planner be received and noted.

70. END OF YEAR ANNOUNCEMENTS

(1) Chairman's Thanks

As this was the last meeting of the Committee in this current civic year, Cllr. Gage the Chairman thanked the members for their support in carrying out the O and S function over the past four years. This had been a learning experience for him as Chairman, and there had been some difficult times as well as more pleasurable ones, and he thanked members for their forbearance.

(2) Steve Bore, Scrutiny Manager

Cllr. Gage advised the Committee that this was Steve Bore's last meeting as he was leaving the Council at the end of May.

He had known Steve for many years both in a personal and professional capacity, and he was an exemplar in his working practices and the support that he gave to the Committee.

The Committee gave Steve a round of applause in appreciation of the work that he had undertaken in support of the Committee over the past eight years.

In response, Steve thanked the Chairman for his kind words. He indicated that he had enjoyed working with Members of the Committee over the last eight years and with the respective Chairmen Cllr. Gage and Cllr. Gyford. He wished members and the new Officer support team the very best for the future.

The meeting closed at 9.00pm.

M. Gage
Chairman