

Report to Neighbourhoods & Communities Select Committee

Date of meeting: 19 January 2016

Subject: Local Policing Proposals

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Committee Secretary: A. Hendry (01992 564246)



Recommendations/Decisions Required:

That the Committee notes the possible implications of the recently proposed Policing cuts, on the Council's Community Safety Service.

Background:

In November 2015, the Essex Police and Crime Commissioner (PCC), Nick Alston and Chief Constable of Essex Police, Stephen Kavanagh, announced proposals to make significant changes to local policing across Essex, in a move to ensure that Essex Police is fit for purpose, in the future.

This report therefore seeks to consider the impact of these proposals on the Epping Forest District as a whole, The Council's services and, in particular, Community Safety.

Report:

1. The PCC and Chief Constable announced the funding challenges facing Essex Police over the next four years, which will see a reduction of £63 million in the Police budget by 2019/20. This was presented as the driver for making changes to the way that Essex Police operates in future and the need to significantly reduce community policing as from April 2016.
2. The proposals include a complete review of the police estate, which currently amounts to 80 buildings, all of which are in a poor state of repair and require £30 million of investment to bring them up to standard. Plans are underway to reduce the estate to 30 buildings, strategically placed across Essex, and to build a new Headquarters that is modern and fit for purpose. This is to be funded through capital receipts from sale of the remaining police buildings.
3. A further plan will see development of new IT infrastructure for the Police that will be designed to enable the public to report crimes and track police response to these on line.
4. As around 83% of the Police budget is currently spent on the salaries of police officers, staff and Police Community Support Officers (PCSO's), hundreds of posts will need to be cut in order to meet the financial savings required. This will include Customer Contact Administrator posts and front desk staff, police officers and around 200 PCSO's.
5. The impact of these changes on the Epping Forest District will see the closure and sale of Epping (and Ongar) Police Station and closure of the front counter at Loughton Police Station. The closest Police 'Counter' will be available in Harlow.
6. In terms of Community Policing, Epping Forest is linked with Brentwood area and the number of staff covering both areas is as follows; one local policing and partnership

Inspector, two Sergeants, 10 x constables one dedicated youth officer and 7 x PCSO's (a reduction of 19 from the current workforce).

7. There will also potentially be further changes to these arrangements both Nationally and locally, to address the current terrorist threat to the UK. Although this is not possible to predict at this time, it may see more overt deployment of uniform staff to areas of identified threat through mutual aid support, which could leave less high profile county areas with reduced staff.

8. These proposed, significant reductions in local policing will therefore have a range of implications for the Council and Community Safety Team. The following information details the Council's responsibilities in respect of Community Safety and the timeframe for the implementation of these changes.

Statutory obligations of the council

9. Section 17 of the Crime and Disorder Act 1998 places a statutory duty on the council to – 'exercise its various functions with due regard to the likely effect of the exercise of those functions on, and the need to do all that it reasonably can to prevent, crime and disorder in its area.'

Police restructure and timeframe

10. The planned cuts that will come into effect on 1st April 2016 are as follows:-

- Closure and sale of Epping, Waltham Abbey and Ongar police stations.
- Closure of Loughton police station front counter. Custody facilities have already been removed from Loughton, but the building will remain as the operational base for police services in Epping Forest. (Currently there has been no announcement to close Limes Farm Police Office, which is open on an infrequent basis).
- There will be a move to the new Community Policing Teams
- In addition to these changes, Essex Police have stated that they will no longer deal with 97% of the anti-social behaviour (ASB) complaints they receive and will sign-post complainants to other services, which in many cases will be local authority. Statistics from the 2015-16 Epping Forest Strategic Intelligence Assessment show police recorded ASB for the district as 3,423 incidents.

Current EFDC structure for dealing with crime and disorder

11. The Council's Community Safety Team deals with ASB under its statutory requirement. There are 2 dedicated full time ASB Investigators working in the Community Safety Team who deal with ASB complaints across the entire district, which involve council tenants and non-council tenants. These officers deal with an average of 350 complaints per year. Currently, they have seen an increase in workload by 12% compared with the previous year.

12. The Council's Housing Management Officers also deal with tenant related ASB. However, due to the complex nature of many cases, the ASB Investigators are often asked to assist, and in some cases, take the lead on cases for Housing, due to their specialist knowledge and skills.

13. The Council's Environment & Neighbourhoods Officers (ENOs) are a team of one manager and 7 uniform Community Safety Accredited Officers (CSAS), who deal with environmental crime issues such as noise and fly tipping.

Potential implications for consideration by the Council

14. With the reduction in policing, it can reasonably be expected that demand for additional Council intervention will increase. However with the expected local government grant reductions over the next 4 years, maintaining the current level of service may become increasingly difficult. It may therefore be necessary to adopt a new Community Safety approach which does not raise public expectations to an unachievable level.

15. As Essex Police moves to a more desktop based investigation process, there may be greater demand for CCTV footage, together with increased requests for use of council re-deployable cameras to cover the likely reduction in hi-visibility police patrols.

16. It is anticipated that the Council could also experience increased demand on public reception areas and the switchboard, for incident reporting and advice. Levels of public frustration at lack of response from public services may also manifest itself in more aggression being experienced by front line officers, including those at public reception areas. Therefore it is very likely that customer facing staff will need additional training, as more diverse enquiries are received from the public.

17. Reductions in police services may lead to increased complaints to Elected Members from discontent constituents. This could generate increased workload for Community Safety as Members try to resolve complaints on behalf of their ward areas.

Options to consider

18. It is suggested that the Council will need to develop a new Community Safety Policy that will set out clear guidelines, as to the scope of work that can realistically be undertaken within existing staff resources. This to include work undertaken by Community Safety and other Directorates involved in dealing with ASB, Licensing and Crime and Disorder.

19. With the reduction in policing for lower level anti-social behaviour complaints and a lack of police presence, the Council may need to address public confidence and fear of crime. Consideration therefore might need to be given to potentially extending the role of the uniformed Environments and Neighbourhoods Officers, in order to provide a tasked response to crime, disorder and ASB. Alternatively, additional resources may need to be made available to employ private sector Community Safety accredited services, to provide this type of activity.

Potential Risks

20. If the Council does not have the ability to provide a tasked uniform response to developing hotspot areas at an early stage, this could allow problems to escalate, thus resulting in the need for higher level intervention and resources and an increase of fear of crime in the district.

21. There is also significant risk that where the Council and Community Safety Partnership has successfully managed to reduce crime and ASB in key areas of the district, the additional pressures on the local authority, will lead to the emergence of new issues and increase in local crime statistics.

Financial Implications: The proposed reductions in local policing could result in the Council needing to apply more resources to Community Safety

Relevant statutory powers: N/A

Background papers: Essex Police report 'Responding to Today's Demands, Planning for Tomorrow's Challenges'

Environmental/Human Rights Act/Crime and Disorder Act Implications: The proposals may potentially impact upon the local environment in terms of ASB, vandalism and crime and disorder.

Key Decision reference: (if required) Not at this time.