

EPPING FOREST DISTRICT COUNCIL COMMITTEE MINUTES

Committee: Safer, Cleaner, Greener Scrutiny **Date:** Tuesday, 27 October 2009
Standing panel

Place: Council Chamber, Civic Offices, **Time:** 7.30 - 9.31 pm
High Street, Epping

Members Present: G Pritchard (Chairman), A Boyce (Vice-Chairman), R Barrett, M Colling, R Frankel, D Jacobs, R Law and Mrs E Webster

Other Councillors: K Angold-Stephens, R Bassett, Mrs R Brookes, Mrs P Smith, P Spencer, Ms S Stavrou, Mrs J H Whitehouse and J M Whitehouse

Apologies: - Ms J Hedges

Officers Present: A Hendry (Democratic Services Officer)

Also in attendance: J Gilbert (Chairman of the Safer Communities Partnership), Safer Communities Officers: C Wiggins, P Gardener, P Southgate and Chief Inspector A Ray (Essex Police)

29. SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS (COUNCIL MINUTE 39 - 23.7.02)

The Panel noted there were no substitute members.

30. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

No declarations of interest were made.

31. NOTES FROM THE LAST MEETING

The notes from 1 September 2009 were agreed as a correct record.

32. CRIME AND DISORDER SCRUTINY - POLICE AND JUSTICE ACT 2006

The Director of Environment and Street Scene and the Chairman of the Epping Forest District Safer Communities Partnership, John Gilbert welcomed the Safer Cleaner Greener Standing Panel to their new Crime and Disorder Scrutiny role. Due to recent changes in the law local authorities are now required to have at least two meetings a year devoted to scrutinising crime and disorder matters. The next meeting was scheduled for February 2010.

He introduced the representatives from the Safer Communities Partnership which included Chief Inspector Alan Ray from Essex Police, the Community Safety Manager, the Community Safety Officer, an Anti-social Behaviour Investigator and Councillor Mrs S Stavrou, the Council's Safer Communities and Transport Portfolio Holder.

The meeting noted that the Safer Communities Partnership (SCP) was working well, last year there was an 8% reduction in crime and although this year they were not quite meeting their targets there was still less crime this year than last.

It was the intention that the public should be invited to attend meetings of this special Scrutiny Panel to put their concerns to the SCP officers attending. It was hoped that this would begin at the February 2010 meeting.

The two items that were scheduled for discussion were i) the cross border effects of anti-social behaviour and dispersal orders; and ii) the protection of vulnerable individuals/families from targeted anti-social behaviour. There had been another topic proposed on crime/violence and licensed premises, but this would be discussed at another meeting.

The Chairman, Councillor Pritchard, asked that Councillor Jacobs give his concerns on the first topic, cross border effects of anti-social behaviour.

Councillor Jacobs started by saying that this arose about two to three months ago, when traders in Ongar were having problems with youths being bussed in by parents from Brentwood. It had transpired that the police in Brentwood had established a curfew there, so their parents had brought them into Ongar.

Councillor Bassett said there was a similar problem in Nazeing, with groups of youths coming in from Hertfordshire. The residents were having to deal with low level anti-social behaviour. There were reports of groups of thirty to forty youths gathering, with reports of drug dealing, convoys of cars and loud music. He had a meeting with the local police who said that the Hertfordshire police were having a crack down on anti-social behaviour in Broxbourne. There was no place for them to go but into Essex. The Essex police had gone into a reactive mode of policing and were doing all that they could as they did not know that the Hertfordshire police were conducting this exercise.

Paul Gardener, EFDC's Safer Communities Officer, commented that this was a complex problem, and they had identified cross border crime as one of the District's main priorities. The Communities Safety Team had just finished a study on burglary. Over a five year period 48% of offenders arrested and dealt with came from the London Metropolitan area. The majority came from within 11 kilometres from our border and the district is well connected by the tube network, buses and the M25, which makes us a magnet for certain types of criminality. They are currently trying to develop a cross border forum with all the bordering authorities to share problems, best practice and solutions. Eventually they will get to know what was being planned before it happened. They have already had a meeting with Hertfordshire/Broxbourne and had identified key actions such as: jointly managing Acceptable Behaviour Contracts; involving schools in Hertfordshire; the use of passive drug dogs; targeting intelligence into drug dealing and implementing road checks. They also wanted to involve and use the community development department.

It should be noted that Broxbourne had a dispersal area for two years that proved to be ineffective.

There was now "Park Guard", a private security operation, which was accredited with Hertfordshire, Essex and the Met. Police, who could issue fixed penalty notices.

He suggested that as the weather gets worse there is likely to be a drop off in the problem.

It was stated that the Community Safety Team sends warning letters to the parents of the youths concerned. They will also establish good links with the police so that they would supply evidence when needed.

30% of warning letters sent out would get a response from parents; once they had started talking to the parents they could then make some progress. It should be noted that if any crime was being committed then the police would deal with it.

EFDC's Safer Communities Team would continue to meet with their counterparts in neighbouring authorities. Unfortunately they are currently down (by 50%) on the number of investigators they should have. They also deal with prolific offenders that cross borders to offend. They now also have a cross border offender scheme meeting, which has been quite effective, where they share intelligence to take offenders to court.

Chief Inspector Ray said that at times up to 80% of offenders came from the Metropolitan area, especially for burglaries. The Met police were carrying out special operations on burglaries which may have affected this area. The police were working hard to stop this with extra officers in Ongar supporting them. They had also laid on two extra cars in the evenings that concentrated on the Ongar and Nazeing areas.

It should be noted that problems with licensed premises had taken his officers to Loughton and Epping on Friday and Saturday evenings.

He met regularly with his counterpart from Hertfordshire, where they have their own problems.

Caroline Wiggins, EFDC's Safer Communities Manager, added that they had sent out 15 warning letters. It should be noted that not all the youths came from outside this area; there were a lot of local youths involved.

They were currently looking for funding for a 'Cross-border Officer' to be the liaison between all the bordering authorities and were meeting with Harlow and Brentwood managers about this.

Councillor Mrs Whitehouse asked Chief Inspector Ray what was the reason the Met police chased their youth out of their area. Chief Inspector Ray said that he could not speak for the Met police, he presumed they were trying to catch them or put them off offending.

Councillor Mrs Webster commented that Waltham Abbey had not been mentioned so far but she was reassured about the good work being done. As for Waltham Abbey youths, they are restricted as there was restricted public transport, so did this mean that they came from within. Did they know the age group of the offenders in Waltham Abbey as that have been some disturbing incidents in the area over the last two weekends? Chief Inspector Ray agreed that Waltham Abbey did not have any transport connections to London and that the latest incidents involved local males in their twenties. Mr Gardener said the average age was about twenty-five for burglaries and theft; Anti-Social Behaviour Orders (ASBOs) were generally given to people of a lower age group.

Paul Southgate, one of EFDC's Anti-Social Behaviour Investigators, said that he dealt with offenders from eight to sixteen/seventeen years old. Warning letters were sent out mostly to local people.

Councillor Spencer asked if Chief Inspector Ray's statistics included cross border offending, especially his ward. Chief Inspector Ray said that his HQ governed what statistics they used. He confirmed that cross border crime was a real issue, but it was their problem no matter where it came from.

Councillor Frankel representing Theydon Bois said that they had an underground station there but the police tactics seemed to be working. They seemed to have had a moderately good year. How much crime was brought in by road transport and could this be helped by the automatic number plate recognition system (ANPR). Chief Inspector Ray said the system was a blessing and gave them good quality hits and arrests. Caroline Wiggins added that the council's has ANPR facilities on their CCTV camera that will be coming into use soon. They were also revamping the neighbourhood watch for the district.

Councillor Mrs Whitehouse said that Mr Southgate said that he spoke to the young people at Limes Farm can he tell us more about this. Mr Southgate said that in reality parents were not often aware that their children had been stopped and spoken to. They were trying to inform parents that this had happened by the use of warning letters and were also encouraging other agencies into go to an area. Mr Gardener added that they used special action groups at Limes Farm using multi agencies to make them part of the solution as there was not always just a policing solution. As an example there was a young girl on an ASBO and other controls, who had now turned her life around, had moved away from all criminal activity and was now studying at Epping Forest College. They needed to target the use of ASBOs.

Councillor Jacobs asked that of the 70% that did not respond to their letters, were they chased up with a repeat letter and what about repeat offenders. Mr Southgate said that the warning letter was just one of the tools available for dealing with anti-social behaviour. There was generally a defensive attitude when they receive the first letter. When they know about it they tend to get involved. If it continues then they move on to the second stage warning which may entail a phone call or a visit to the family. If it continues then more focused action was called for, such as an acceptable behaviour contract or the use of other agencies or family court action.

Councillor Jon Whitehouse thanked the police for their efforts in Epping High Street recently. He then asked what the effects of the burglaries were and who picked up the pieces? As for the ANPR system is it a data bank for all number plates? Chief Inspector Ray replied that the system would supply the background information that came with a car number plate. As for victims of crime, they have a policing pledge to attend within the hour. Scene of crime and neighbourhood police would do follow up visits. Every victim would get a tailored service.

Councillor Mrs Smith commented that another rural area of the district, Roydon, had problems with youths there. She made a plea that Roydon be included in their cross border projects. She asked what would happen if there was no funding for the cross border officer. The expertise of our crime reduction partnership is well recognised but what were the risks if elements of the partnership became weak for some reason, how would you deal with the weak link. Caroline Wiggins replied that if they did not get the funding for the cross border officer post it would just take longer to get the cross border partnership up and running. Mr Gilbert said that the crime reduction partnership was currently strong and successful. Each partner was an individual organisation in its own right and all the partners contribute resources and bring a lot to the table. The partnership will grow and it may expand to include the Corporation of London and the Lea Valley Regional Park Authority. They were also seeking membership from the magistrates.

The Chairman, Councillor Pritchard, then moved the discussion on to cover the second item, that of protection of vulnerable individuals/families from targeted anti-social behaviour. He asked Councillor Mrs Whitehouse to introduce this item.

Councillor Mrs Whitehouse started by asking if the council was satisfied with the Councils response to harassment. How do we monitor harassment and get evidence and what was the response time?

Mr Gardener said there were strong structures in place for harassment. There was an anti social behaviour co-ordinating group where incidents could be flagged up by any member of that group. It meets monthly and any items brought up are acted upon. The group also co-ordinates actions between the various agencies involved.

Councillor Mrs Whitehouse asked if all agencies attended regularly. Mr Southgate said that they did and they could work quickly, they had recently got an injunction within 5 days. Mr Gardener said that victim care was absolutely essential; some action would always be taken. They were very proactive in dealing with complaints and would keep the victim updated and informed.

Councillor Frankel commented that there were concerns that multi agency working was sometimes hampered by data protection, was this a problem? Mrs Wiggins said that communication and information sharing was very good. They had signed up to intelligence sharing, which makes sure that all agencies could work together. Data protection was not a concern. Chief Inspector Ray said it was bad about ten years ago but it was different now. They did share information and had formed links with other agencies going back years. Mr Gardener added that they were reviewing their offenders list to see if it could be progressed with their partners.

Councillor Frankel asked how information was passed down to the officer on the beat attending incidents. Would they have access to any of this background information that the joint agencies hold? Mr Gardener said that officers would attend meeting where all the relevant information would be shared. Chief Inspector Ray added that everything on their intelligence system was available to their operators who are connected to the officers by radio or via their PDAs.

Councillor Mrs Whitehouse asked if all data was shared with officers on the beat. Chief Inspector Ray replied that at an incident, an officer would deal with the situation they were faced with. If the same situation encountered was repeated over time then they would put in place any systems necessary to deal with a recurring incident.

Mr Gardener commented that they had given training on partnership working to probationer PCs, showing them the lateral problem solving mechanism that they have in place.

Councillor Mrs Webster said that she had been a councillor a long time and they have always been trying to get agencies to work together. Now we have been shown that it was working and they are doing a good job. They should be congratulated.

The Chairman, Councillor Pritchard, moved the discussion along asking for any general questions that the members may have for the officers present. He started by asking if the partnership was happy with the mechanism to communicate with the public. Mr Gilbert said that more could be done and that needed to engage with the public and publicise what they do and their successes and results. Next year's strategic assessment would include the outcomes from an open day to be held on 17 November where they were to ask the public what they think; the last hour of which they would have a question and answer session so that they could hear some of their concerns.

Councillor Angold-Stephens said a few years ago there was a problem in Loughton which was dealt with by the Transport Police. How does the partnership work with the

Transport Police? There was also the problem of the night time economy in towns, which is now starting to generate problems late at night. How are the Police dealing with this? Chief Inspector Ray remembered the incident in Loughton. They still work in close cooperation with the British Transport Police. As far as the night time economy was concerned they were happy they were doing quite well at present as they have enough officers to cover the area.

Councillor Mrs Smith asked if the partnership was a statutory consultee of this authority. Mr Gilbert said they were a statutory body and existed in their own right and can be used as a consultation body for other agencies. Councillor Mrs Smith then asked how the partnership fitted into hierarchy of our services. Mr Gilbert said that was a difficult area as each member was a body in its own right. They try to take collective decisions and see them through. Every EFDC report has a special Safer Cleaner Greener section on it and is required to consider crime and disorder for every decision it makes.

Councillor Mrs R Brookes said it was great that PCSO had surgeries but it was a pity they were so poorly attended. She noted that a few months ago the police and the PCSO had a stall at the farmers market which was a good idea; and that there had been good proactive initiatives taken at Murray Hall. There was a problem on underage drinking where large groups gathered; what happens to the shops selling the alcohol to the under aged? Chief Inspector Ray said this had always been a problem and they worked closely with Trading Standards and sometimes they went and had a word with the shopkeepers. In his experience children usually got alcohol from their house.

Mr Gilbert summed up by saying he hoped they had demonstrated that the Partnership was a working partnership, and that their interventions really did work. It should be noted that using the outcome of the place survey and other surveys that local residents were fearful of crime and there was a need to understand why people had this fear and the issues around criminality. He hoped that members now felt better informed having attended this meeting.

Councillor Frankel said it was one of the best scrutiny meetings he had attended.

Councillor Mrs Smith said she would like this forum to look at CCTV coverage and the officers duties in what was described as 'CCTV co-ordination' and for the Parish and Town Councillor to be informed of what they were doing. It was decided that this could be scheduled for another meeting

The Chairman thanked the officers and Chief Inspector Ray for coming to this, the first meeting scrutinising crime and disorder in the district.

33. REPORTS TO BE MADE TO THE NEXT OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY METING

It was agreed that the successful first meeting of this crime and disorder scrutiny panel be reported to the next meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

34. FUTURE MEETINGS

The dates of the Panels future meeting were noted.