

EPPING FOREST DISTRICT COUNCIL
NOTES OF A MEETING OF SAFER, CLEANER, GREENER SCRUTINY STANDING
PANEL
HELD ON TUESDAY, 15 APRIL 2014
IN COMMITTEE ROOM 1, CIVIC OFFICES, HIGH STREET, EPPING
AT 7.30 - 9.04 PM

Members Present: Mrs J Lea (Chairman), Mrs H Brady (Vice-Chairman), K Angold-Stephens, R Butler, S Murray, Mrs P Smith and J M Whitehouse

Other members present: W Breare-Hall and G Waller

Apologies for Absence: K Avey, Mrs T Cochrane, G Chambers, L Girling, Ms Y Knight, Mrs M Sartin (Chairman of the Council) and P Spencer

Officers Present J Gilbert (Former Director of Environment and Street Scene), J Chandler (Assistant Director (Community Services)), P Gardener (Communities Safety Officer), J Harding (Partnership Analyst) and A Hendry (Democratic Services Officer)

32. SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS (COUNCIL MINUTE 39 - 23.7.02)

It was reported that Councillor K Angold-Stephens was substituting for Councillor L Girling and that Councillor Jon Whitehouse was substituting for Councillor P Spencer.

33. NOTES OF THE LAST MEETING

The notes of the 11 February 2014 meeting were agreed as a correct record.

34. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

No declaration of interest were made.

35. TERMS OF REFERENCE AND WORK PROGRAMME

Mr Gilbert noted that he was here on behalf of Mr Hall, the Director of Communities who had to attend another meeting. He also noted that this was the last meeting of the year for this Panel. In reviewing the Panels terms of reference he noted that one of the problems this Panel had always faced was that they received minutes of the various meeting they were supposed to inspect too late for them to undertake any meaningful scrutiny. This was usually due to the fact that the meetings dates did not match up with this Panel's meeting dates and this meant that they were sometimes months in arrears. This was something that could be looked at in the new year when reviewing their terms of reference for the coming year. Councillor Murray agreed that we should find a better way to handle this problem of late minutes, although he would not like to lose the NEPP, Highways Panel or the Police and Crime Panel minutes, as they had proved useful. Councillor Smith was in accord with Councillor Murray's comments on this.

Councillor Waller noted that the present terms of reference did not mention 'Country Care', which should come under the Panels Green terms and they should be added in for completeness.

The Panel noted that all the Scrutiny Panels would be reviewed in the new year by a Task and Finish Panel looking at the future work of the Panels and how they could fit into the new directorate system.

36. PRESENTATION ON THE COMPARATIVE OVERVIEW OF CRIME IN THE DISTRICT BETWEEN 2012 AND 2013

The Community Safety Officer, Paul Gardener introduced Inspector Andy Fusher, Essex Police and Josie Harding the Partnership Analyst who were there to help with the presentation on the comparative overview of crime in the district in relation to our priority areas, between January and December 2013.

Ms Harding noted that these figures were for the calendar year 2013, to keep in line with what had recently been reported in the press. The meeting noted that Essex was split into three policing areas, North, West and South Local Policing Areas (LPA). Epping Forest District was in the West LPA, along with Harlow, Bentwood and Thurrock and was the only area showing a reduction in crime figures of 3%. Although overall, Essex had seen a 1% increase in crime during this time period. Epping Forest had the fourth largest reduction in crime, having seen 377 less offences committed in 2013.

It was noted that there were two types of burglary that were recorded, Domestic and other. Domestic burglary included all inhabited dwellings, including caravans, houseboats, holiday homes and sheds and garages connected to the main building. The other category included non-domestic places such as businesses, abandoned buildings, warehouses, and sheds and garages not connected to a dwelling. Epping Forest had the fourth largest reduction in Essex for domestic burglary, with a 18% reduction. Year on year this figure was getting lower. Out of an approximate 52,000 households in our district only 1% were the victim of domestic burglary. It was noted that burglary usually peaked in the winter months when you had darker evenings, this was the window of opportunity for the thieves as houses stood empty waiting for their occupants to return home from work.

Of the 'other' types of burglary, Epping had the sixth largest reduction in Essex, with a 10% reduction. It was also noted that less than 1% of the population in our district were victims. It was also noted that there had been a 6% reduction in vehicle crime in Epping in 2013.

Asked if 'millennium burglaries' i.e. breaking into a house to steal car keys, came under the heading of domestic burglary, Ms Harding replied that they did.

It was also noted that there had been a 30% reduction in repeat victims of Domestic Violence and over 50% reduction in repeat victims of domestic burglary. This was identified after a repeat visit 6 months after the initial crime had occurred. As for Anti Social Behaviour it was noted that we had the seventh lowest rate in Essex.

There had also been a public perception survey and this had identified that 81% were satisfied with their local area; 85% felt that they belonged to the neighbourhood; and 84% felt that hate crime violence was not a problem.

Councillor Lea asked about the turning of off street lights at night time and noted that there were more burglaries when it got darker. Ms Harding noted that the burglaries mostly occurred during the evenings before people got home. At present there was not much data on street lighting to make any assumptions. Inspector Fusher noted that in other areas such as Maldon, where they have had dark skies for some time (7 years), they had noted that there had been a about a 29% reduction in crime. They had turned on the lights in certain areas and had seen a rise in crime, so had turned them off again. They can be very specific as to where they turned on lights and have done so outside a certain shop that had been suffering anti-social behaviour. Councillor Waller added that this was an issue in many parts of Essex where street lights have been turned off. Theydon Bois has had a dark sky policy for some years and evidence could be gathered from there.

Councillor Murray noted that Loughton Station was lit up but the path by Great Eastern park was not. This footpath should be lit up from the station. Also, who carried out the public perception survey and what was the methodology used. Mr Gardener said that they had a sample size of 250; they had used various people to get responses and they were looking to get a better sample size in the future. Councillor Murray suggested that they could use the survey of Council House Tenants in the future to help in the public perception survey.

Councillor Murray noted the recent coverage in the press about police crime statistics. He wanted to know how reliable our statistics were. Ms Harding replied that our statistics did not come from the police but from the Home Office and was considered to be neutral, but it was quite broad in scope. Inspector Fusher noted that the data was unqualified and needed qualification. Recording of the figures was complicated and because of the way the data was collected and because of this it could count one crime as two.

Councillor Butler noted that people did not feel safe on dark streets and it could be dangerous just crossing the street. The presentation mentioned that an average cost of a burglary was over three thousand pounds, how was this figure arrived at? Mr Gardener said that they were Home Office estimates which looked at the entire cost from the courts, insurance, police time etc. It was not an exact science but they needed to equate costs to benefits. The benefit of having an analyst on our team was that they could drill down into the figures and get meaningful data, which was of great benefit to us.

Councillor Brady noted that it was an interesting presentation and that the crime figures for Epping were going down; for how many years have these figures been collected? Mr Gardener noted that we were obliged to carry out this analysis by the government and produce a plan. This has been going on since 2007, when this legislation came in. Councillor Brady noted that different areas have different sizes of population; how would that affect the figures. She was told that they did a year by year comparison so as not to skew the figures.

Councillor Smith noted that the Community Safety Partnership had invested a lot to make it work. Our team should be proud of the improvement in the district that they have helped put in place. Have we experienced any difficulties in co-ordinating with other partner authorities. Inspector Fusher noted that the main agencies work well together but the biggest help would be more NHS participation; but they have their own reasons why they cannot help us. They could help identify where violence occurs, be it in the pubs, clubs or the home, but they are beginning to help us and share information.

Councillor Smith noted that victims support in Essex had been restructured some years ago. Have they achieved their targets? Mr Gardener noted that we do not interact with this agency but had good links with the voluntary agencies 'Safer Places' dealing with domestic abuse. They have people in Accident and Emergency units to pick up on assaults and have shown up some hidden aspects of domestic abuse.

The Chairman thanked Ms Harding, Mr Gardener and Inspector Fusher for their interesting presentation and answering the Panels questions.

37. COMMUNITY SAFETY PARTNERSHIP ASSESSMENT 2014-15 AND THE EFDC COMMUNITY SAFETY PARTNERSHIP PLAN.

Following on from the presentation the Panel considered the Community Safety Partnership Strategic Intelligence Assessment for 2014-15.

Councillor Smith was happy to endorse this report. However it seemed not to explain how rural crime had been lowered. Mr Gardener said they had done it in association with the Farmers Neighbourhood Action Panel (NAP), tackling their concerns over crime over the years and was working really quite well now.

Councillor Breare-Hall wondered what the prediction was for the upcoming 'Tour de France'. Inspector Fusher noted that they were expecting about 20,000 people to come into the district on that day, but thought that it would be a low crime event and there would be a lot of officers on the ground that day.

Councillor Waller noted that the Community Safety Partners also had difficulty in engaging with the health service. It should also be noted that we devote a lot of resources to our community safety team, more than most in Essex. We were encouraging more people to report domestic violence, which was incidentally, also making our statistics go up.

Councillor Jon Whitehouse noted that the night time economy involved further investment in CCTV and officers on the ground; it also involved licensing and taxi issues. Was there a forum where this was being discussed? Inspector Fusher said they had started a new initiative in Loughton and Epping to bring the partnership together. He noted that the CCTV in Epping was very good but less so in Loughton. Part of dealing with the night time economy would be education of the younger persons. Crimes were being reduced and there were now less violent crimes happening.

Councillor Angold-Stephens noted that 42% of burglary offenders came from London; did the police still use the Automatic Number Plate Recognition (ANPR) system to establish this? Also, taxi ranks, the operators were very supportive of having taxi ranks at night; this would be starting in Epping and then moving out to Loughton. Inspector Fusher replied that the problem was getting people to report where a crime had been committed. Loughton tended to get people up from London and the Police did use the ANPR and work in conjunction with the British Transport Police for those travelling here by train.

RESOLVED:

That the Community Safety Partnership Strategic Intelligence Assessment for 2014-15 was endorsed by the Panel.

38. EPPING FOREST DISTRICT COUNCIL COMMUNITY SAFETY PARTNERSHIP PLAN

The Community Safety Officer, Paul Gardener introduced the Community Safety Partnership Plan, noting that this was in response to the priorities identified in the strategic assessment. Dwelling Burglaries had gone down but they would never drop off the plans as a priority item, we can but make improvements over the years. We will reassessing in six months to make sure we have not missed anything. They were also looking 'courier crime' and would be concentrating on this in the next few months.

Councillor Smith noted that one comment to the partnership would be an observation of attendance of the partners to meetings, especially by the NHS and the Fire Service. Mr Gardener said this was a frustration, but noted that the NHS tended to service a large number of partnerships, and it was usually only one person who did this. But we would follow this up.

Councillor Murray noted that Roding Valley High School had bought into the 'Prison me, no way' scheme this year, as they were very impressed with this from last year.

Councillor Jon Whitehouse noted that the objective on street pastors did not mention anything about education. Mr Gardener noted this and said they could pick this up and amend it.

Councillor Whitehouse asked about the CCTV objective; did we have the resources to look at the footage. Mr Gardener replied that the Police could log into our systems once a problem has been reported to view the incident as soon as possible.

On consideration the Panel was happy to endorse the partnership plan.

RESOLVED:

That the Epping Forest District Council Community Safety Partnership Plan be noted, commented on and endorsed by the Panel.

39. REPORTS TO BE MADE TO THE NEXT MEETING OF THE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

It was noted that the partnership assessment document and the community safety plan would be reported to the next Overview and Scrutiny Committee meeting.

The meeting noted that this was the last meeting for John Gilbert ahead of his retirement and wanted their thanks and appreciation noted for all his hard work over the years.

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