

TORRIDGE DISTRICT COUNCIL

EXTERNAL OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY MEETING

Barum Room - Brynsworthy

Tuesday, 1 November 2022 - 1.00 pm

- PRESENT Councillor J Manley (Chair)
- Councillor C Cottle-Hunkin (Vice-Chair)
- Councillors L Ford (Substituting for C Woodhouse), S Harding,
C Hawkins, S Langford, N Laws (Substituting for P Pennington)
and C Leather
- Independent Person L Bach
- ALSO PRESENT Superintendent - Devon & Cornwall Police and Chair of
Toby Davies Community Safety Partnership
- Sergeant N - Devon & Cornwall Police
Walker
- J Williams - Public Health & Housing Manager
- D Smith - Community Safety & Public Health Lead
- T Vanstone - Senior Electoral & Democratic Services
Officer
- K Hewlett - Electoral and Democratic Services Officer

157. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Pennington (Councillor Laws substituted) and Councillor Woodhouse (Councillor Ford substituted).

Apologies were also received from Kenton Baker (Independent Person) and Staci Dorey (Head of Legal and Governance).

158. MINUTES

It was proposed by Councillor Harding, seconded by Councillor Leather and –

Resolved:

That the minutes of the meeting held on Wednesday 20 July 2022 be agreed as a correct record.

(Vote: for 6, no 0, abstentions 2)

159. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

No requests for public participation were received.

160. ACTION LIST

Chair reviewed the action list with members and the following updated were provided:

Action 137 – It was confirmed that the Bucks Mills action would remain ongoing, and an update was provided by Councillor Harding.

Action 154 – Democratic Services updated members on the action for dentistry commissioning and explained that no report had been received at the time of the meeting. Chair advised she would contact Councillor Hellyer, who is the County representative on the Health and Adult Care Scrutiny Committee.

161. DECLARATION OF INTERESTS

Members were reminded that declarations of interest should be made as and when the specific agenda item to which they related was under discussion.

162. AGREEMENT OF AGENDA ITEMS PART I AND II

There were no Part II items.

163. URGENT MATTERS BROUGHT FORWARD WITH THE PERMISSION OF THE CHAIR

No urgent matters raised.

164. CONSIDERATION OF THE FORWARD PLAN

Chair reviewed the forward plan with members. No changes were made.

165. COMMUNITY SAFETY PARTNERSHIP

Superintendent Toby Davies introduced himself as the Local Policing Commander for North and West Devon and the current Chair of the Community Safety Partnership.

Members were also introduced to Nathan Walker, Community Safety Sergeant, Community Safety Manager Janet Williams (Community Safety Manager) (TDC) and Natasha Rowlands (Service Lead – Vulnerable Needs Group and Community Safety) (NDC) and Tim Birtwistle, (Community Protection Officer) (NDC). The Local Elected Members for Devon County, North Devon Council (NDC) and Torridge District Council (TDC) were also introduced – Cllr Paul Henderson, Cllr Caroline Leader and Cllr Philip Hackett.

A detailed introduction to the Community Safety Partnership the Safer Devon Partnership was provided for members. Superintendent Davies then drew members attention to the update report for the NDC and TDC Community Safety Partnership. It was confirmed that over the last 12 months crime had increased in the local area – it was explained that comparative data was taken from 2019 (pre-Covid).

The main points highlighted were as follows:

- From 2019 there has been a 4 percent increase in crime for the local 'patch'. This was said to equate to 11,000 crimes across last 12 months.
- Violent crime made up the majority of these crimes and crimes of violence had seen an increase of 10 percent.
- A third of violence was domestic abuse.
- Sexual violence recorded crimes are up 20 percent.
- Burglary and theft are down to 15 percent.

Superintendent Davies advised that:

- There had been an increase in hate crime locally, with 250 reported crimes in the last 12 months – most of these cases were reported in the last 3-5 months. This was stated as an area of concern and potential focus for the Community Safety Partnership.
- Anti-social behaviour (ASB) was down from 2019 figures; however it was still recognised as the most visible issue for the area, with 2,840 reports in last 12 months.
- Devon and Cornwall ranked the third safest within the force area. It was also stated that outcomes and crime data integrity was best in the force.

The Strategic Assessment and feedback from CSP joint committee were referenced at this point and Superintendent Davies highlighted the main areas of focus – these were confirmed as:

- Serious violence (inc VAWG)
- Safer Streets (inc ASB)
- Road Safety
- Emerging Threats (Hate Crime was highlighted, along with Sexual Violence)

Principles and themes were then highlighted for members:

- High Intensity work - targeting those causing the most harm in the community and then working with them in a trauma informed way.
- The rurality of the community and the added sense of vulnerability and issues this part of the community experience.
- National priorities – counter-terrorism and Prevent, as well as work on anti-slavery and modern day slavery and domestic homicide reviews.

Superintendent Davies summarised the work taking place for the Partnership.

Serious violence / violence against women and girls – the work of the multi-agency forum was highlighted for members, along with the preventative work taking place through awareness campaigns and education resources.

In terms of Countylines work it was confirmed that the CSP area was the smallest, but responsible for sharing the highest amount of Partnership Intelligence through to the Police. The positive impact of this was highlighted.

The Safer Streets initiative was explained, and Members were advised of a steering group for North Devon and Torridge. The group look at hot spots and how to coordinate response. Some of the local projects in the districts were then highlighted.

It was confirmed that Barnstaple town centre had successfully bid for Safer Streets funding from the Police and Crime Commissioner (PCC), and there was a summary of how this funding would be used.

Road Safety work locally and within the region was highlighted.

It was confirmed there had been an increase in Road Policing staff and the success of Operation Snap were also highlighted. It was confirmed that there was a push for funding more speed detection teams, with dedicated officers in local area – based in South Molton. The ongoing work of Community Speed Watch was also highlighted.

The trauma informed work with the most vulnerable and complex individuals was further explained for members.

Although it was specific to Devon and Cornwall Police, the outcome from the recent MH Inspectorate Review were mentioned and it was recognised that members may have questions relating to the outcome and recent Special Measures for the force.

Members were reminded of the next steps for the CSP in setting the priorities of the partnership and ensuring these fit within the national picture and they feed into the Strategic Assessment.

Areas to consider were highlighted as:

- Hate Crime
- Legal obligation to CSP on serious violence
- Change in the funding process from the PCC.
- Safer Streets – the opportunity in relation to funding and future bids.

Questions:

The response to ASB in local areas and issues relating to reporting were raised. Superintendent Davies highlighted some of the outreach work that is available via partners and highlighted how work could be coordinated and planned to target issues in the longer term. The Community Safety & Public Health Lead for TDC highlighted some of the work that had taken place in relation to the case highlighted.

Concern was expressed at the length of time a 101 call can take. It was recognised by Superintendent Davies that this was one of the key areas HM Inspectorate picked up on. It was confirmed that a plan was in place regarding response times, including an increase in staffing and improved IT. Different ways of reporting were also highlighted, especially online reporting and via the 101 email.

Discussion moved on to the other areas the Inspectorate had identified as a concern and Superintendent Davies summarised the position for the local Force Areas in relation to these concerns.

Members raised the Safer Streets agenda and mentioned specific concerns in relation to increased street homelessness, street drinking and begging. It was felt there had been an escalation in incidents and that reporting was taking too long. Members also stated that residents and shoppers were expressing concerns about safety as a result.

Superintendent Davies acknowledged concerns and raised the importance of partnership work, using the teams within the CSP to coordinate the response. CCTV was also highlighted and the potential of Safer Streets funding to bring together all the services that can respond to the complex issues at play.

There was a query in relation to the operation hours for CCTV in Barnstaple. The Community Safety Manager for NDC confirmed that on Thursday, Friday and Saturday it was operational until 3am, and all other days it was operational until midnight. Current bids were also looking to increase coverage.

It was also confirmed that CCTV cameras are always recording, but there are areas that cameras couldn't reach (blackspots). It was hoped that the Safer Streets funding would help to provide a mobile camera, which can be deployed to a hotspot and blackspot areas.

During discussions members were reminded to ask questions relevant to the focus of the joint CSP meeting.

Discussions returned to reporting, public perception, and concerns regarding drug use and ASB in Barnstaple town centre. The need for a coordinated and partnership approach was restated and was suggested that members could be involved with the planning for Safer Streets funding as well.

It was confirmed that mental health would be a focus of a newly appointed worker linked to the high intensity work programme. Members were also advised of the multi-agency team who are working with rough sleepers and street attached. It was stated that Safer Streets meant there would be an increase in education for members of the public and this could raise awareness of the team's work.

Superintendent Davies recognised the need for more officers in the area and explained some of the barriers to attracting newly qualified officers and those requesting a transfer – the lack of affordable housing was highlighted.

Members discussed some of the positive engagement work that had taken place locally to manage ASB before escalating to the Police. This led to discussions around engaging with disaffected young people, the impact of youth service cuts and lack of places and spaces for young people to go.

Members discussed consultation that had taken place with a local school council on play equipment and the importance of tolerance of young people within the wider community was also highlighted. During discussion access to SPACE outreach workers was mentioned and it was explained this provision could be accessed via community safety contacts.

Members asked about the increase in hate crime locally and it was recognised that the local increase was also being seen across Devon and Cornwall and nationally. Although there wasn't a pattern to the incidents race was the biggest issue locally.

Members asked if there was correlation between Houses of Multiple Occupancy (HMOs) and antisocial behaviour. The Public Health and Housing Manager at TDC said figures could be shared with TDC members and explained that Bideford wasn't seeing any specific HMOs targeted by Police due to ASB. It was explained where there was enough evidence Police and Local Authorities had powers to close HMOs.

During discussions on face-to-face policing members were advised that PCSOs would be able to make themselves available for surgeries if a place and space could be identified.

Members provided further examples of ASB within their areas and the need for funding towards more youth worker presence, places to go and engagement work. The recurrence of ASB as a theme in the meeting was recognised and some of the youth engagement work accessible via the CSP was highlighted. The Mini Police Cadets were also mentioned as a way to positively engage with young people through schools.

The setup of a mini community safety group in Torrington was highlighted and it was stated that the school are involved in this group along with the council.

Members went on to highlight public perception of crime, especially on social media, and whilst members could be reassured it was felt that further communication was needed to reassure the public, including older people, that town was a safe place to visit. Superintendent Davies explained that bids were being completed to increase the street presence in the area and agreed that more work was needed in relation to promoting the work taking place.

The Community Safety Manager for NDC went on to highlight some of the communications planned as part of the Safer Streets funding. The 'tap to change' initiative was mentioned, where people can donate to charity at local businesses in Barnstaple town. It was hoped this would steer people away from giving to those begging.

Members raised the Police and Crime Commissioner's aspiration to open front desks. It was asked how this could be balanced with actual staffing levels.

It was confirmed that more officers had been recruited, but there was a high turnover, so there was still an issue in terms of staffing numbers. It was explained that a taskforce had been established to look at spreading the resource more fairly across the area, so it was hoped resourcing would improve.

In relation to front desks, it was recognised that this was a commitment for the PCC and something Bideford had requested. Superintendent Davis reminded members of the Police Surgeries and advised that the information on days and time would be on the website.

Members asked about the future of CSP and funding opportunities. Superintendent raised that the Chair role needed to be reviewed and highlighted that partnerships across Devon were also looking at how they could work together more. Members were advised that there was still a legal duty to have a community safety function to ensure partnership working.

Concerns were raised regarding the lack of youth work provision and the Community Safety Sergeant highlighted some of the provision available via their team.

- A PCSO for all the colleges, who works with the safeguarding teams.
- PCs who are Youth Intervention Workers, trying to prevent young people becoming ongoing offenders.
- Mini Police
- A YOT Officer in the Youth Justice Service
- As part of Safer Streets there is a dedicated youth intervention worker for Park and Pilton for the next 11 months, looking at offending behaviour in schools.

It was recognised that this provision was from the Police and it was suggested that the concerns around youth service provision in the area should be raised with the County Council representatives. During discussion it was highlighted that there was a gap in representation from education and the County Council on CSP.

Following a question from members about the CSP bite size training it was agreed these will be considered before the next District and Parish elections in May 2023.

Members asked about rural crime and highlighted the changing nature of this crime. The isolation and vulnerability people can experience as a result was recognised, and Superintendent Davies highlighted some of the partners the Police and Partnership are working with.

During discussion TDC Local Area Advisory Groups were highlighted as a positive way to share information with the more rural areas in the districts.

Following a question to members of the two committees about the CSP function and its membership members were asked to provide their feedback to their CSP elected members or the Community Safety representatives for their areas.

Councillor Langford left the meeting at 14:50

Following a question regarding the achievements of the CSP Superintendent Davies clarified some of the points made within the report regarding partnership work, whilst recognising the need to improve on reporting and 101.

The Chief Executive (NDC) referred to the report and explained some of the positives that have come about from the CSP, specifically in relation to partnership working and the coordination of work and funding bids.

The issue of funding was raised and the need for CSP to continue to coordinate efforts was stressed. It was recognised that all partners were facing increasing struggles in terms of budgets and that this increased the importance of partnership working.

It was agreed that a one to one meeting with the Chairs of the two Committees and with Superintendent Davies would be organised for January.

The meeting commenced at 1.00 pm and closed at 3.03 pm