
COMMUNITY COMMITTEE

MINUTES of the Meeting held in the Council Chamber, Swale House, East Street, Sittingbourne, ME10 3HT on Tuesday, 10 January 2023 from 7.00 - 8.25 pm.

PRESENT: Councillors Lloyd Bowen, Steve Davey, Mike Dendor, Oliver Eakin, Tim Gibson, Alastair Gould, James Hall, Nicholas Hampshire, Elliott Jayes (Vice-Chair), Peter Macdonald, Richard Palmer (Chair), Hannah Perkin, Ken Rowles and Julian Saunders.

PRESENT (Virtually): Councillor Cameron Beart.

OFFICERS PRESENT: Steph Curtis, Kellie MacKenzie, Graeme Tuff and Emma Wiggins.

OFFICERS PRESENT (Virtually): Martyn Cassell, Jay Jenkins and Jo Millard.

ALSO IN ATTENDANCE (Virtually): Councillor Angela Harrison.

APOLOGY: Cameron Beart.

559 **Emergency Evacuation Procedure**

The Chair outlined the emergency evacuation procedure.

560 **Declarations of Interest**

No interests were declared.

561 **Minutes**

The Minutes of the Meeting held on 1 November 2022 (Minute Nos. 408 – 414) were taken as read, approved and signed by the Chair as a correct record.

Part B Minutes for Information

562 **Community Safety Strategic Assessment**

The Chair invited a Member to speak. The Member drew attention to the announcement from Chief Inspector Sarah Rivett that there would be a reduction of Police Community Support Officer (PCSO) levels and there were no current plans for recruitment. He said it was bad news which would affect a lot of people.

The Community Safety Manager introduced the report which provided an overview of the Swale Community Safety Strategic Assessment process and sought feedback from the Committee on the current Community Safety Partnership (CSP) performance and any emerging issues the CSP might need to focus on. The Community Safety Manager advised that Swale Borough Council (SBC) was a statutory partner of the CSP and was annually required to complete the strategic assessment which included: a review of current performance against priorities; discussion about emerging issues and consideration of wider threats and opportunities which might impact the work of the partnership.

The Community Safety Manager reported that the CSP Executive Group would meet at the end of January 2023, and would consider data and feedback from partners and the Community Committee. She drew attention to Appendix I, Swale Community Safety Partnership Priorities 2022/23 and advised that the priorities had not significantly changed much and it was more the specific focus within them that had been amended. She referred to Appendix 2, Swale Community Safety Partnership Executive Performance Exceptions Report November 2022, and said that the Strategic Assessment was still being drafted. Members were required to provide feedback based on the questions set out on page 6 of the report.

The Chair invited Members to consider the report. In the discussion that followed Members made points and asked questions which included:

- Noted that the Police received more funding from Council Tax than SBC and sought value for money;
- saddened that PCSOs were being reduced and hoped that any replacement police officers would attend incidents as the PCSOs had;
- welcomed more police officers as they had more enforcement powers than the PCSOs;
- referred to page 12 of the report and welcomed the drop in Anti-Social Behaviour (ASB) but wondered how the figures compared to 2019-20?;
- local MPs needed to be lobbied about the illegal use of e-scooters;
- a visible Police presence in high streets was very important;
- how could ward members feedback concerns to the Police?;
- suggested more out-reach education on e-scooters from the Police or CSP;
- there needed to be clearer information on community events such as litter-picking;
- would like to see the Swale Fusion Festival held again as it helped to revitalise Sittingbourne High Street;
- the report lacked information and needed to get the community out-reach going again;
- welcomed the great work on domestic violence and violence against women;
- concerned about the increase in hate crime in Kent and the CSP should lead and work with partners on how this could be reduced;
- referred to the increase in shoplifting and wondered whether it was due to the cost-of-living crisis;
- important to note the loss of various funding streams within the report and how the CSP could remain effective;
- concerned about the increase in crime in Sittingbourne High Street and considered that the closure of Phoenix House, Sittingbourne had not helped;
- what would the different approach to modern slavery entail?;
- should focus on modern slavery and raise awareness amongst agencies in particular health providers;
- the comment in paragraph 3.1 on page 17 of the report about closing the Focus area work in Sheerness due to a reduction in ASB was wrong and should be reconsidered;
- the statistics under the crime priority showed a big increase in all categories, was that due to the Covid-19 Pandemic?;
- considered ASB was often under-reported and that needed to be addressed;
- aware that domestic abuse could increase during a recession;
- needed to focus on the issue of vehicle ASB; and

- considered the CSP were doing a good job but often the Police did not respond to residents' concerns.

In response the Community Safety Manager said that Kent Police were looking at resources and were consulting internally on their neighbourhood policing review. She reminded Members that some information had been circulated to them and that the CSP would be looking at the impact of the new neighbourhood policing model which would come into effect in June 2023. The Community Safety Manager said that a new District Commander and new Community Safety Unit Inspector were now in post and agreed to feedback comments about outward facing work.

The Chair reminded Members that e-scooters were legislated by central government and agreed that lobbying local MPs and the Kent Police and Crime Commissioner could be useful. The Community Safety Manager said she was aware the Police were willing to do some targeted operations to educate people on e-scooter use and enforce incorrect use if possible. She said that breaches of lockdown rules were classed as ASB hence the increase for the 2020-21 period.

The Community Safety Manager said that hate crime was being looked at, and awareness in respect of Modern Slavery had been raised in 2015 when the Modern Slavery Act came into effect, and she agreed that both should be ongoing priorities for the partnership. The Community Safety Manager said that ASB was often not reported and suggested the CSP promoted different ways that residents could report ASB such as online. She did not think that the Covid-19 Pandemic had caused an increase in burglary levels. Violence against the person had been increasing for years and was mostly due to domestic abuse.

The Community Safety Manager said road safety figures had not been looked at recently as they had been reducing. She agreed to whether see this was something the CSP could focus on moving forward.

The Chair thanked Members for their input and welcomed the new Police Constable's commitment to prioritising community policing. Members were asked to feedback any further comments to the CSP Executive Group by 26 January 2023.

Resolved: That the report be noted.

563 **Open Spaces and Play Area Strategy**

The Greenspaces Manager introduced the report which provided the basis for starting the process and consideration of a reviewed and updated Open Spaces and Play Area Strategy for Swale. Members thoughts, ideas and ultimate agreement to a process to provide the necessary strategy for the period 2023-2028, focusing on play areas, as the Environment Committee were looking at the open space element. The Greenspaces Manager said the current open space strategy was developed in 2017 and covered the period 2018-2022, he drew attention to its key principals set out at page 23 of the report.

The Greenspaces Manager said open spaces were a key strand of the Council's strategic priority 2 (Investing in our environment) and responding positively to global challenges. He drew attention to Appendix I, Open Spaces and Play Area Strategy 2018-2022 and Appendix II, Play Area Refurbishment-Improvement Plan 2021-25. He asked Members to consider any changes or additional priorities and drew attention to the questions set out on page 23 of the report.

The Director of Regeneration and Neighbourhoods drew attention to the financial implications set out on page 24 of the report. She asked Members to bear in mind that most of the play equipment had been funded via Section 106 Agreements and other financial contributions.

The Chair invited Members to consider the report. Members raised points and asked questions which included:

- What were the timescales and would the pre-election period have an impact on them?;
- would like to see more of the Multi Use Games Area (MUGA) surfaces used as they allowed provision of sports for wider age groups;
- if old equipment was functional and safe and could be refurbished then the Council should keep it;
- improvements were needed at Sittingbourne Skate Park;
- if there were any health and safety issues at any of the Council's play areas then they should be closed until repaired;
- concerned about the Council no longer adopting open spaces from developers and organisations given the known issues with management companies and their lack of upkeep of such areas after the ten-year period;
- the Council would not find it easy to find volunteers to manage play areas;
- the play areas within the Roman Ward of Sittingbourne were adequate and being used;
- could involvement of volunteers and letting them know how they could help be built into the strategy?;
- drew attention to some play areas which had been destroyed by fire and the need to explore, "designing out crime" within open spaces which was inexpensive to do;
- welcomed the focus on making play areas accessible for the disabled;
- would like to see more focus on liaising with parent groups such local Parent Teacher Associations;
- the Council needed to be careful of outsourcing play areas and ensure appropriate legal safeguards in respect of their upkeep were in place;
- important not to ignore the rural areas;
- felt that sometimes older children missed out as play areas were often aimed at younger children;
- volunteers and partnerships were fundamental to ensuring play areas were safe and maintained; and
- concerned about the use of rubber in play areas and asked if more natural play areas could be provided.

In response, the Greenspaces Manager said the decision to not adopt local open space and play areas within new developments, had been taken five years ago and he was only aware of one complaint during that period. He said it came down to finances and the Council's ability to resource it.

With regard to volunteers, the Greenspaces Manager said the Council had worked very well with volunteer groups on projects in Swale such as: Milton Creek Country Park and In Bloom. He said the focus for volunteers could be written into the strategy.

The Greenspaces Manager said they tried to incorporate natural play where possible to make play areas more interesting and valuable to play. He said play areas being damaged by fire seemed to have been a particular issue within the last couple of years. It was thought that brighter colours were often made from plastic which were attractive when evaluating design, so it was important to consider the design and robustness of equipment.

In terms of timescales, the Head of Environment and Leisure said the technical assessment and audit had not been commissioned and whilst work on them would continue through the pre-election period, it was unlikely to be considered by the Committee until after the May 2023 local election.

Resolved: That the report be noted.

564 **Forward Decisions Plan**

Resolved: That the Forward Decisions Plan be noted.

Chair

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All minutes are draft until agreed at the next meeting of the Committee/Panel