

STEVENAGE BOROUGH COUNCIL

COMMUNITY SELECT COMMITTEE MINUTES

Date: Tuesday, 27 March 2018

Time: 6.00pm

Place: Shimkent Room - Daneshill House, Danestrete

Present: Councillors: S Mead (Chair), M Notley (Vice-Chair), J Brown, E Connolly, L Harrington, J Lloyd CC, J Mead, A Mitchell CC and G Snell

Start / End Time: Start Time: 6.00pm
End Time: 7.05pm

1 **APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

There were no apologies for absence.

There were no declarations of interest.

2 **MINUTES - 7 MARCH 2018**

It was **RESOLVED** that the Minutes of the Community Select Committee meeting of 7 March 2018 are agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

3 **THE SOSAFE COMMUNITY SAFETY ACTION PLAN 2017/18 AND EMERGING PRIORITIES FOR 2018/19**

Stevenage Borough Council Chief Executive Officer informed Members that he was the ex-officio Chair of the Responsible Authority Group (RAG). The RAG Chair acknowledged support from all the stakeholders. It was indicated that although Stevenage faced a number of challenges and was lowly ranked on the crime league table for the county, the crime clear up rate was impressive.

It was pointed out that the RAG report covered performance and emerging priorities for 2018/19. The RAG Chair highlighted the joint community strategy, efforts to combat domestic abuse, improvements in community cohesion and the community spirit that had resulted in an increase in members of the Neighbourhood Watch. Members were informed that funding cuts by central government had a bearing on policing but SBC was benefitting from a co-funding arrangement with the Police and Crime Commissioner.

The Community Safety Manager presented a report covering the following SoSafe priorities for 2017/18:

- Antisocial Behaviour (ASB)
- Hate Crime

- Safeguarding
- Violent Crime
- Reassurance/public engagement
- Scams and Fraud
- Serious and Organised Crime (SOC) and drugs
- Intelligence/Information Sharing

Members also received details of some of the events that were held in 2017. In response to a question about the coverage of safeguarding Silver Street Meets in the borough, it was clarified that previous efforts were concentrated in the North and West parts of the borough and the focus was now on the southern areas of the borough. Members were reassured the North and West areas of Stevenage would still be considered by the safeguarding teams.

Members sought clarification on efforts to combat the issues of drugs and knife crime. It was acknowledged that in order to reduce knife crime, it was necessary to tackle perceptions surrounding the carrying of knives and providing advice on handling peer pressure to carry knives. Members were informed that knife crime awareness in schools was one of the initiatives aimed at reducing knife crime. It was confirmed that police intelligence suggested a link between drugs and other criminal activities such as modern slavery and child sexual exploitation. Members were reassured that there were no specific drug-related modern slavery cases in Stevenage.

In response to a question about gang culture – particularly in schools – it was clarified that Stevenage did not have stereotypical gangs. It was indicated that Stevenage had a problem of petty criminal elements who were out of school and who frequented public areas such as town centre spots close to some food outlets. Members were informed that police intelligence suggested the infiltration of Stevenage by some hard core criminal elements from outside the borough. It was stated that intelligence gathering from residents (including Members) and crime awareness in schools would assist in combating gangs in Stevenage.

Members raised questions regarding the priorities for 2018/19 given the cuts in police resources. It was indicated that Stevenage was doing relatively well in crime prevention given the resources at its disposal. It was acknowledged that although the priorities seemed to be ambitious, they were worth pursuing. Members expressed concern for the reduced funding for policing from central government and the lack of support from some stakeholders who were better placed to tackle crime drivers such as drug addiction.

Members queried whether there was an expectation of a fall in crime numbers. Members were informed that it was highly unlikely that crime figures would fall in view of changes in the way that crime is recorded. It was stated that crime trends would be different if there was an analysis of comparable crime statistics that were collected using the same method. It was pointed out that some crimes that were previously considered as petty had to be recorded under the current guidelines and this contributed to the perception that crime in Stevenage was on the rise. It was noted that Stevenage was relatively safe and therefore reports of crimes drew a lot of attention. Members agreed that social media contributed to the public perception

about crime. It was suggested that highlighting positive crime prevention statistics such as Stevenage's burglary rate that was the lowest in the county was one way of addressing the public perception. It was also outlined that under-reporting crime might act as a deterrent for victims. It was pointed out that current crime league table data did not clearly reveal the resources required for a significant improvement in league position.

Members welcomed the Joint Community Strategy and noted that it was streamlined and easy to read. Members also expressed satisfaction with information sharing initiatives, the strategy focus on domestic abuse and the use of projects such as the food bank to raise awareness and gather intelligence.

Given that young males were the majority of night crime, Members raised questions about efforts to engage the young males. Members also sought clarification used to classify residents affected by domestic abuse. As a response to these questions, it was acknowledged that more could be done to engage the youths. Members was informed that caution was exercised in the use of the terms "victim" and "survivor" given that there was a stigma attached to the word "victim".

It was **RESOLVED**:

- That the report is noted
- That the Community Safety Manager provides details about the compilation of the crime league table
- That Herts Constabulary provides a narrative to the crime statistics to provide clarity on successes and shortcomings of local policing
- That Herts Constabulary engages more young males in crime prevention programmes

4 **URGENT PART 1 BUSINESS**

None.

5 **EXCLUSION OF PRESS AND PUBLIC**

Not required.

6 **URGENT PART II BUSINESS**

None.

CHAIR