

**OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMISSION
30 NOVEMBER 2023
6.32 - 7.57 PM**



Present:

Councillors Pickering (Chair), Welch (Vice-Chair), C Eberle, Egglestone, M Forster, Haffegée, McLean, C Thompson, Watts, Webb and Jefferies
Victoria Hill, Parent Governor Representative

Present Virtually:

Councillor McKenzie-Boyle

Also Present:

Councillor Iskander Jeffries, Executive Member for Culture, Delivery and Public Protection
Kevin Gibbs
Susan Halliwell, Chair of the Crime and Disorder Committee
Kevin Gibbs, Executive Director: Delivery
Ann Moore, Assistant Director: Democratic and Registration Services

Also Present Virtually:

Deputy Superintendent Andrew Grahame, Thames Valley Police
Alison O'Meara, Bracknell Forest Council
Audrey Johnson
Katie Flint, Policy and Performance Lead

Apologies for absence were received from:

Councillor Barnard

32. Declarations of Interest and Party Whip

There were no indications that councillors would be participating while under the party whip.

33. Urgent Items of Business

There were no items of urgent business.

34. Public Participation

No submissions had been made by members of the public under the Council's Public Participation Scheme for Overview and Scrutiny.

35. Community Safety

Crime and Disorder Committee

The Overview and Scrutiny Commission sat as the Crime and Disorder Committee for the first part of the meeting.

An overview of the Community Safety Partnership's priorities and data was provided, and the following issues were highlighted:

- Violence with injury was down 1% in Bracknell compared to no change in Thames Valley Police (TVP) statistics overall.
- The number of incidents of violence with injury were still below pre-pandemic levels and included Domestic Abuse figures.
- Harassment recording rules had changed recently.
- Burglary figures were down compared to four years ago but were on the increase locally again.
- Domestic Violence Protection Notices (DVPNs) had doubled this year. It was explained DVPN's may be used for small periods of time and were useful for helping someone move home without the threat of violence and without the need for Domestic Violence Protection Orders which required Court sign off.
- The number of sexual offences had risen by 9% but it was thought this related to a new strategy helping to bring people to justice for rape as well as an increase in the number of people reporting sexual offences, including historic non-consensual sex disclosed even if evidence did not warrant an investigation.
- Sexting offences were increasing. It was now considered a crime every time the picture was shared on a device not only the offence for taking the picture. The majority of sexting offences were dealt with in schools.

Key focus areas for 2022/23 included:

- Tackling exploitation and serious violence across all ages.
- Reducing town centre anti-social behaviour and crime including shoplifting.
- Reducing harm caused by domestic abuse: management of perpetrators and enforcement; delivery of the Safe Accommodation Action Plan
- Residents had also requested that ongoing monitoring of anti-social behaviour, burglary and vehicle crime take place.

The following questions were asked regarding information contained in the presentation and answers were given:

Question: Did the 9% increase in incidents of Domestic Abuse form part of the 53 Domestic Abuse incidents and were they found inside the home?

Answer: Yes, the 9% increase related to all rape reports which were included in the 53 Domestic Abuse incidents reported and had been perpetrated by someone the person knew.

Question: Were the number of serious offences likely to level off as the increase had been largely due to the way numbers were recorded, rather than a rising trend?

Answer: Unlikely they would decrease as while the number of crimes were not increasing per person the number of people residing in the borough was increasing.

Question: Neighbourhood disputes appeared to account for a large proportion of the number of crimes committed but were a lot of them online?

Answer: Yes, there had been an increase in the number of calls received by TVP about online crime and it was thought to be a growth area, as was cybercrime and social media harassment.

Question: How do we make sure the work of the CSP dovetails with the Crime and Disorder Committee work to ensure best use of resources?

Answer: A PCC representative sits on the CSP and were active partners in helping to plan the CSP grant allocation. They also provided resources to help with data analysis although this was limited. The CSP could bid for funding from the PCC but evidence was required to show how it would meet PCC, as well as CSP, priorities.

Question: How was the CSP tackling the issue with e-scooters given the Government's recent shift in strategy?

Answer: A new plan was currently being developed to tackle 'e-bikes' which TVP would share with Councillors shortly. This would include the purchase of off-road cycles for Police Officers to deploy when a problem escalated.

Question: Could the 9% increase in crime statistics be broken down more widely, for example by traffic, and were there any other trends in subgroups not in these statistics?

Answer: It was difficult to breakdown data as TVP collated Bracknell and Wokingham statistics together as that was the 'beat geographical area'. However, it should be noted shoplifting and neighbourhood crime, which included theft and particularly vehicle theft, were the two areas on the increase in Bracknell.

Question: If crime was increasing, even if marginally, what would be the knock-on effect to local authority services? In particular, vulnerable groups who might end up with social care involved. Could social care cope with the increase in demand?

Answer: This would require a response from social care and a written answer would be given to Councillors after the meeting.

Question: Should Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) have its own awareness campaign?

Answer: FGM reports were low in the borough but work had been carried out by TVP and the Council to train officers to spot and deal with FGM. It was clarified FGM was not considered as sexual assault as the practice was recorded as honour based violence, rather than being of a sexual nature.

Question: Were there statistics on the number of black women affected by Domestic Abuse/Sexual Abuse?

Answer: Berkshire Women's Aid was a partner organisation which provided ethnic breakdown on the number of people they supported. Also, the number of people referred to the Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Conference (MARAC) was broken down by ethnicity. Police Officers always recorded ethnicity of those involved when a crime took place.

Question: Was there a large amount of transgender hate crime in the borough?

Answer: Transgender hate crimes accounted for the smallest amount of hate crime but there had been an increase over the past three years, which had also been seen nationally. A recent audit had shown TVP were good at recording hate crimes.

Question: A Government statistic in 2021 showed 24% of crimes committed were by people with mental health so how were officers dealing with people with mental health issues?

Answer: The statistic was not one TVP officers were aware of, but they received a huge number of calls from people with mental health issues and worked with health and social care officers to ensure people with mental health issues received the 'right person, right care approach'. TVP would attend calls involving people with mental health issues if serious harm was likely.

The Commission were asked to support the work of the CSP by:

- Encouraging residents to report issues directly to the police using the advice shown on the final slide.
- Participating in the consultation for the new three-year CSP Plan that would likely go out in Spring 2024.
- Commenting on the Serious Violence Strategy Action progress which would be presented at next year's Crime and Disorder Committee meeting.
- Commenting on the Exploitation Strategy which would be compiled in 2024 and also sharing the Look Closer Child Exploitation Campaign which the CSP was working on currently.
- Supporting the first White Ribbon Day in Bracknell on 9th December to raise awareness of male perpetrator violence against females.

Action: It was agreed the Education, Skills and Growth O&S Panel needed to review the Child Exploitation Scrutiny Review to ensure the recommendations were captured in the new Exploitation Strategy.

Action: Deputy Superintendent, Andrew Grahame, to share e-bike strategy with Councillors when it was finalised.

Action: Audrey Johnson, Assistant Director: Early Help and Communities to provide a response from social care officers regarding the impact of crime increasing, particularly the effect on vulnerable groups, and whether social care services could cope with the increase in demand.

The Chair thanked representatives from the CSP for attending. This ended the session of the Crime and Disorder Committee.

36. Council Plan Overview Report

The Chief Executive, Susan Halliwell, provided an overview of the Council Plan Overview Report (CPOR) and highlighted the following achievements and risks:

- Highlights included multiple summer fun events such as the launch of the summer wellness exchange; the opening of the Binfield Health and Community Hub; the inaugural climate change summit led by the leader of the Council and a new migration team to improve the lives of individuals placed in the borough.
- Risks – the predicted overspend in next year's budget of £1.8-2 million had been downgraded to £1.2-1.7 million but the Council was still predicting a deficit budget. The reason for this was largely due to an increase in demand for services, a rise in the unit cost of service provision and high inflationary pressures.

Members of the Commission asked the following questions and answers were received as follows:

Question: On page 59 the number of children attending the Lookout appear to have decreased, why was this?

Answer: The Lookout figures were an anomaly as they covered the summer, when numbers usually decreased, and over two quarters the Council was hitting its targets for the number of visitors.

Question: Why had Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) figures not progressed as expected?

Answer: An update was provided to the Executive on progress against the Written Statement of Action (WSA) which showed three quarters of actions had been completed. The WSA was a two-year action plan, so not all actions were expected to be completed already, and 11 were outstanding. However, it was noted the Council was in the process of developing an action plan as part of the Safety Valve project - a government driven programme to help Council's manage their SEND services and financial performance, which was likely to detract from officers' abilities to complete targets on the WSA this quarter.

Question: What was the reason for the 50% drop in maintained schools being good or better in the borough, as highlighted on page 59?

Answer: There were only two maintained schools in the borough. One of those was College Hall, the Council's Pupil Referral Unit (PRU), which had recently been judged Inadequate. Formal arrangements had been put in place to help support the PRU to improve.

Question: Was there data to show the reasons behind the number of staff being on long term sick, as shown on page 69?

Answer: A breakdown of reasons was not available but at the beginning of the quarter 38 members of staff were on long term sick and by the end of the quarter there were only 15, which equated to 1% of staff.

Question: What actions needed to be taken to help ensure value for money as part of the apprenticeship programme in the Council?

Answer: There were currently 50 apprenticeships across the Council and schools in the borough and the Council were proactive at offering opportunities to apprentices.

Question: Was the stated number of homes receiving planning permission on page 66, L284, incorrect as it showed only nine homes had been built this quarter?

Answer: Yes, due to the way the Council received S106 funding receipts it meant the reporting process did not show the actual figure of 519 new homes approved that quarter.

Question: What was going to be included in the high-level application referred to on page 64, 5.02.03 – i.e. were PV panels going to be on top or behind the charging station and café?

Answer: A feasibility study was being undertaken and a briefing note on the project would be provided to all Councillors setting out the ambition for the site.

Question: Was the number of complaints upheld against the Council on page 71 unusually high?

Answer: Most complaints related to decisions and outcomes for children and young people with SEND and were not always the local authority's fault as they sometimes had to wait for partners to provide reports. The number of complaints was down this quarter compared to quarter 1. Complaints were not unexpected as it was all part of the improvement process.

Question: What was the reason for schools not engaging in the transition programme on page 58?

Answer: Locally, and nationally, transition was thought to be a difficult issue to solve. While there had been success in being part of this programme for one primary/secondary school it had not succeeded in others and a survey of Year 7 pupils had been undertaken to understand engagement in schools.

Question: Was there funding available to mend play equipment and clear land at Chaucer Woods?

Answer: A report highlighting a new capital funding programme was going to be presented at Executive on 12th December and consultation would begin on 13th December as part of the Council's budget proposals.

Action: A briefing note would be circulated to all Councillors setting out the ambition for the London Road site.

Councillors thanked officers for the report and in particular for the level of detail in the comments section which was considered more informative than the previous quarter.

37. **Work Programme Update**

An update on the work programme would be provided at the next meeting on 11th January.