

Unconfirmed



Minutes of a Meeting of the **Scrutiny Committee** held remotely via Zoom , on **Thursday, 18 June 2020 at 6:30pm**

Members of the Committee present:

Councillor Edward Back, Councillor David Beavan, Councillor Stuart Bird, Councillor Judy Cloke, Councillor Linda Coulam, Councillor Mike Deacon, Councillor Andree Gee, Councillor Louise Gooch, Councillor Tracey Green, Councillor Geoff Lynch, Councillor Mark Newton, Councillor Keith Robinson, Councillor Caroline Topping

Other Members present:

Councillor Peter Byatt, Councillor Tony Cooper, Councillor Mark Jepson, Councillor Mary Rudd, Councillor Letitia Smith

Officers present:

Katherine Abbott (Democratic Services Officer), Sarah Carter (Democratic Services Officer), Anita Humphrey (Communities Manager), Nick Khan (Strategic Director), Matt Makin (Democratic Services Officer), Nicole Rickard (Head of Communities)

Others present:

Superintendent Kerry Cutler (Suffolk Constabulary), Chief Inspector Sarsfield Donohue (Suffolk Constabulary)

1 Apologies for Absence and Substitutions

There were no apologies for absence.

2 Declarations of Interest

There were no Declarations of Interest made.

3 Annual Report on Community Safety 2019/20

The Chairman welcomed Superintendent Kerry Cutler (Southern Policing Command) and Chief Inspector Sarsfield Donohue (Eastern Policing Command) to the meeting. He invited both police Officers to provide a brief verbal update on their current policing priorities.

Superintendent Cutler referred to Operation Velocity, undertaken in east Suffolk, to address county lines issues and which remained in operation. During that time, in

excess of 200 arrests related to the supply of Class A drugs had been made. Superintendent Cutler said that the impact of county lines was relatively small in east Suffolk.

Superintendent Cutler also informed the Committee of on-going initiatives to engage positively with young people. This included working with schools to educate children and their parents on knife crime, and additional investment in school liaison officers since November 2019. The four key strands were county lines, knife crime, relationships and social media and the approach was to educate and guide young people to reduce exploitation and improve safety. Superintendent Cutler outlined the formation of the Youth Engagement Team involved in this work across the district. In particular, those aged 10- 17 years and vulnerable to poor life choices were being targeted by the police with positive results.

Chief Inspector Donohue advised that following successful two operations there were no active county lines operating in the district at the moment. He outlined the police activity which had taken place in certain locations to achieve this result. Chief Inspector Donohue provided the Committee with crime figures for the period June 2019 to May 2020; it was noted that these were all below the national average. The Committee was also advised that detection rates were consistently high at 30% over three years. The impact of Covid-19 on the delay of Crown Court hearings was also noted. Chief Inspector Donohue advised that hate crime had reduced with no 'hot spots' identified. Also, violent crime has also reduced, possibly because of the limited night time economy and no active county lines.

The Chairman invited questions of the two police officers.

A member of the Committee asked if county lines had been impacted upon by Covid-19 or if the trend had been identified before the pandemic. Chief Inspector Donohue said county lines in the district had been on the decline for some time before Covid-19. He stated that although county lines had tried to establish itself in certain locations, targeted action by the police had resulted in these being dismantled and arrests made within 24/36 hours. Superintendent Cutler added that the Constabulary monitored drug activity across the county on a daily basis and acted quickly and decisively to address this matter.

Another member of the Committee asked if a briefing note on the Constabulary's school engagement activities could be provided to the Committee. Superintendent Cutler said this would be provided. The member also referred to the increase in cases of domestic abuse and asked if more specific figures on the numbers of victims who have engaged with support could be provided. Superintendent Cutler said these were not to hand but would be forwarded after the meeting. Superintendent Cutler said incidents of domestic abuse were monitored closely, discussed and addressed in conjunction with partner organisations. The Committee noted that incidents of domestic abuse were under-reported, particularly now during the lock-down and that this was due in part because of the victim's fear of retribution and, therefore, the number of reported incidents was not indicative of the full picture. Another member of the Committee asked if there were increased numbers of child victims as a result of the lock-down which were undetected because of school closures. Superintendent Cutler replied that there were concerns that there were incidents of hidden harm and that,

when schools re-opened, it was anticipated that the reporting of safeguarding issues would increase. The police had placed posters in supermarkets and garages with helpline details to try and reach those who, under lock-down, were unable to move about easily to seek help.

The member of the Committee welcomed the reduced numbers of hate crimes and that no 'hot spots' had been identified in the district; the member asked for the definition of a 'hot spot' in this regard. Superintendent Cutler replied that reduced numbers of incidents were welcome but that this too was often a hidden and unreported crime. She explained that such crimes were closely monitored to identify potential clusters or patterns which were then proactively targeted.

Another member of the Committee asked how many operational officers within Superintendent Cutler's policing command were 'on the beat'. Superintendent Cutler said this was dependant on the shift but, as a maximum, 26 officers plus proactive teams operating from vehicles, armed officers, dog units and six officers under Operation Scorpion. In addition, during the response to Covid-19 5 special constables. The member of the Committee asked if this was an overall increase. Superintendent Cutler said the numbers had increased in late 2019 and that another five officers would be located at her response base in due course.

The Chairman referred to the Office of National Statistics ranking of public confidence in Suffolk Constabulary being at 52% and asked Superintendent Cutler to comment. Superintendent Cutler acknowledged that the figure was disappointing and that the Constabulary's senior officers were working to address and improve the reported loss of confidence and new and improved ways of engaging with communities. Another member of the Committee suggested that the reduction and loss of neighbourhood teams had been contributing factor in the loss of public confidence. Chief Inspector Donohue said that previous restructures for budgetary reasons had impacted on police visibility; he added that it would take time to rebuild public confidence but the Constabulary was taking the matter seriously and would work hard to address it.

Another member of the Committee referred to a spike in incidents of anti-social behaviour in Bungay which was addressed by a direct police response including increased visibility; she asked if this would remain or had been a limited response. Superintendent Cutler said that the same team and the same level of response, however, due to Covid-19, it was possible the officers had been slightly less visible.

There being no further questions, the Chairman, on behalf of all the Committee, thanked Superintendent Cutler and Chief Inspector Donohue for their informative briefing and full response to members' questions.

At the invitation of the Chairman, the Assistant Cabinet Member with responsibility for Community Safety introduced the annual report on Community Safety for 2019/21 **ES /0403** and invited the Head of Communities to summarise the item before the Committee. The Head of Communities summarised the report which referred to East Suffolk Council's statutory obligation to work in partnership with other agencies to reduce crime and disorder across the district. This work was progressed through the East Suffolk Community Safety Partnership and supported the delivery of the Police and Crime Commissioner's and Suffolk Constabulary's key priorities. The report also

provided an overview of the projects that had been delivered during the last twelve months, including those that had focused on early intervention and prevention, enhancing an individual's sense of personal safety within their own community, building community resilience and modelling pro-social behaviour and good citizenship, providing young people with positive role model experiences and widening their support networks and ability to make positive choices. The Head of Communities also summarised key initiatives which had been undertaken and as detailed in the report. In concluding the summary of the report, the Assistant Cabinet Member wished to pay tribute to the Communities team officers for all their hard work particularly during Covid-19.

The Chairman invited questions.

A member of the Committee asked if Covid-19 had impacted upon or halted the partnership work with other agencies. The Communities Manager referred to initial plans for summer activities for young people in Leiston and Saxmundham; she explained that whilst the bigger initiatives could not be offered it was hoped to be able to provide something suitable and safe.

Another member of the Committee asked about specific data for the community partnerships areas and localities. The Assistant Cabinet Member said that, unfortunately, the Constabulary's data system was unable to provide data by areas/localities. With reference to paragraph 8.3 of the report on hate crimes, the member asked if data for West Felixstowe was available. The Communities Manager said she would ask the county council for this information.

A further member of the Committee, with reference to the transformation funding received in 2018 for three years, asked if further funding for this purpose would be sought. Both the Assistant Cabinet Member and the Head of Communities confirmed that every effort to attract and secure funding would be explored.

Another member of the Committee asked about enhancing community resilience and the integration of campaigns, for example, including plastic action champions, the Suffolk Wildlife Trust etc. within Crucial Crew events. The member also referred to the potential summer education catch-up programme for school children and the addressing of current hidden safeguarding needs. The Head of Communities said the focus of the Crucial Crew agenda was predominantly safety and therefore the green agenda might not be appropriate; she added that plastic action was the focus of the Waveney Youth Council's Youth Take Over Day in late 2019 and that the Youth Voice project could also be explored. With regard to the Black Lives Matter campaign, the Head of Communities advised that the Council's prevent programme encouraged awareness, understanding and a reduced sense of difference.

A member of the Committee praised the work of the Communities team during the Covid-19 pandemic and, in particular, their efforts in support of the district's communities. The member referred to incidents of anti-social behaviour in Bungay and asked at what point some intervention work might be possible. The Communities Manager said that this had been discussed and that interventions, subject to the exit strategy for Covid-19, would commence as quickly as possible. The member also said that it would be helpful if the police could provide data broken down more specifically

so that responses could be better targeted; the Communities Manager shared that conversations were taking place with the Constabulary about how we can get this data

Another member asked about care leavers. The Assistant Cabinet Member referred to the work with partner agencies such as Suffolk Family Focus which is part of the Suffolk Troubled Families Programme; the Committee was advised of the probable future funding situation.

There being no further questions or matters raised for debate, the Chairman moved to the recommendation which was proposed by Councillor Robinson, seconded by Councillor Green and by unanimous vote

RESOLVED

That the Scrutiny Committee, having received and commented upon the contents of the Annual Report on Community Safety 2019/20, duly noted the report.

8.03pm - The meeting adjourned briefly and reconvened at 8.10pm

4 Cabinet Member's update

The Chairman welcomed Councillor Rudd to the meeting and invited her to provide her portfolio update.

Councillor Rudd thanked the Committee for inviting her to update it on the current priorities, challenges and key deliverables for teams within her portfolio over the next six months. The update focused on two Licensing Services and the Food Safety team within Environmental Services.

Licensing Services was responsible for alcohol, entertainment, and taxi licensing in East Suffolk. The service licensed pubs, clubs, music festivals, betting shops, bingo halls, adult gaming centres, pleasure boats, private hire vehicles and hackney carriages - including two rickshaws, one in Woodbridge and one in Felixstowe. It did not licence tattooists, tanning studios, and anything to do with the selling or showing of animals. In recent months, the main challenge had been, and continued to be, the impact of Covid 19 on the licence trade and the night time economy. Pubs and restaurants had been required to be closed since 23 March 2020 and compliance by premises with this requirement had been consistently high across East Suffolk during lock down with only a very small number of isolated reports of non-compliance which were investigated and appropriate enforcement action taken. Latitude, one of the biggest music festivals in the country, which usually brings 40,000 thousand people to Henham Park near Southwold over four days in July, had been cancelled; and there has been little business for the taxi trade as schools had been closed, people have not been socialising outside their home and there has been limited shopping in stores.

The priority for the Licensing Service during lock down had been to support licensees to help them maintain, and where possible and practical, keep running their businesses in incredibly difficult circumstances. This included:

- Allowing licensees to defer paying their Premises Licence fee until 30 September 2020.
- Advising premises which wished to remain open as to how to lawfully provide takeaways and off sales
- Giving credits for the application fees for Temporary Event Notices for events which were unable to go ahead
- Allowing licensed drivers to spread the cost of their annual licence upon renewal by granting three month licences.
- Sourcing alternative garages for mechanical inspections, when garages closed because of Covid 19, to enable vehicles to remain licensed
- Agreeing to drivers installing protective screens in their vehicles to protect both drivers and the travelling public and give the public greater confidence to continue to use taxis during lock down.
- Signposting licensees to central government grants and hardship funds which they may be eligible to claim

The priority for the Licensing Service after lock down would be to help licensees recover and rebuild their businesses. It was anticipated that the government might allow pubs and restaurants to reopen from 4 July 2020. The Licensing Service would support licensees by working with them, responsible authorities and local residents to make appropriate use of outside space in East Suffolk's towns and villages (including beer gardens, pavements, highways and public open spaces) to facilitate licensed premises reopening and trading with sufficient public safety measures in place to accommodate social distancing requirements. The team would continue to provide businesses with advice on how to comply with the law in relation to public health measures and advice to support businesses seeking to make changes to their Premises Licences to operate in a safe and sustainable manner; where there was discretion over inspections undertaken by the Council, the team would review these with the aim of reducing the administrative burden on businesses whilst protecting public safety. The team would take action against those businesses which could not demonstrate that appropriate safety measures were in place to protect public safety and in so doing ensure fairness and a level playing field for those businesses which were compliant with social distancing requirements by, for example, limiting capacity and redesigning the layout of premises to protect staff and customers; and would be flexible as to the payment of annual licence fees by extending the period for payment.

The Licensing Service's key objectives would be to help the licensed trade and the night time economy to recover from the damaging impact of Covid-19. The licensing trade and hospitality sector made a significant contribution to the local economy, especially the night time economy in East Suffolk and were also an important part of the tourist offer. In January 2020, it was reported to the Licensing Committee that East Suffolk Council had issued 1071 Premises and Club Premises Licences. In this regard, East Suffolk was bucking the national trend of pub closures with a small but steady growth in the number of licensed premises. In the short term, as a result of the impact of Covid-19, it was likely, sadly, that those numbers would fall but the challenge for the Licensing Service, and the wider Council, was to try to use whatever leverage it had and support it could give to reduce the number of closures to the absolute minimum by supporting existing licensees, whilst encouraging those looking to start up new businesses in the licensed trade and hospitality sector.

The challenges faced by the licensing trade and hospitality sector to recover from Covid-19 will be significant and should not be underestimated. Councillor Rudd said she was confident the Council's Licensing Services working together with other service areas from across the Council, both inside and outside my portfolio, and in partnership with other responsible authorities, licensees and local residents, will address these challenges to rebuild and in time, return to growing, East Suffolk's licensed trade and hospitality sector.

Councillor Rudd said she was not aware of many premises intending to close permanently or taxi drivers who were planning on stopping (other than those who were considering retiring anyway). She added that the full impact of Covid-19 on the licence trade/hospitality sector would not be fully known until the end of the year and much would depend to what extent the public return to using pubs/restaurants/taxis post-lock down as to whether businesses in this sector could recover their losses and keep their businesses viable.

Councillor Rudd outlined arrangements for the recovery of the Port Health Service post-Covid-19. The Service had returned to a three shift working pattern, reintroduced weekend working and had recalled two retired members of staff to provide additional capacity to increase food sampling and bring the service back on track with statutory sampling frequencies. Following lock down, the Port Health Service was restructured into two completely separate teams to reduce contact, protect the staff and ensure the service could be maintained if members of one team were to contract the virus. This had an immediate impact and although essential elements of the service could still be delivered, the sampling rate for imported foods significantly reduced. As part of the recovery phase, the Service took advice from the Corporate Health & Safety Team about Covid-19 secure requirements for the Port Health office and these were implemented in early June.

In terms of future resilience, Councillor Rudd explained how, just prior to lock down, a new internet connection to the Port Health office had been installed to increase the bandwidth available and so improve remote access. This work was delayed when the pandemic hit but was completed in early June. There was a limit to how much Port Health work could be delivered through remote home working but some document checking and project work has been delivered remotely during lock down and processes and workflows might be adapted to enable homeworking within the limits of the service.

The infectious disease control element of the Port Health service had been particularly important during the pandemic. The Masters of all vessels arriving at Felixstowe had been required to submit a Maritime Declaration of Health to confirm that the crew are were well and there was no infection on-board.

The transition period for Brexit would end on 31 December 2020. The Government had announced that there would be no extension to the transition period although elements of the controls would be phased in over the first six months from January 2021. The Council was participating in regular meetings held by government departments to consider the consequences of a 'no deal'. The majority of the imports through Felixstowe were from outside the EU and the current checks would continue

as normal unless and until the UK government amended the legislation around imported food control. It was still unclear at the moment what level of checks would be required on goods being imported from the EU. Felixstowe had a ferry service bringing some trailers of food in from the EU and it was likely that some level of checks would be required at some point.

The Council had submitted another significant bid for funding from the Food Standards Agency (FSA) to support Brexit planning, in particular support for the training of staff.

Cabinet had approved a project to redevelop the PHILIS system at its meeting in June. The system was now 10 years old and needed to be redesigned to ensure it incorporated all of the latest developments in computer software design and remained cutting-edge. This would require a significant investment from the Port Health Reserve and some external technical support. The project was expected to take 12-18 months to complete. As part of the project to redevelop PHILIS, it will be necessary to restructure the PHILIS team to ensure capacity and skills continue to improve and evolve this market leading software on an ongoing and continuous basis. The family of PHILIS users continued to grow driven partly by FSA funding for all Port Health Authorities to prepare for Brexit. The team are closely supporting the ports that have recently had the system installed including Dover, NE Lincolnshire, Belfast, Hull and Goole. The new PHILIS system would be modular in its design which might open up new marketing opportunities as some of the UK's smaller ports might not require the full PHILIS package.

Succession planning of staff was highlighted as a risk for the service. The recruitment of two vacant Port Health Officers had been unsuccessful and the introduction of a more extensive training programme to develop these skills in-house was being explored.

The Committee was informed that the service worked very closely with London Port Health Authority and have commissioned a project, with external funding, to look at how this partnership might develop in the future and what opportunities that might bring.

There was a lot of activity underway to support Test and Trace across the county. Stuart Keeble, Director of Public Health, was leading this work and there are around eight work-streams supporting this from complex settings and communities to testing, data and governance. The Head of Environmental Services & Port Health was leading the work-stream on complex workplaces and enforcement with support from colleagues in Trading Standards and the district and borough councils.

The Suffolk Covid-19 Outbreak Control Plan was on its 10th iteration and would be signed off at the end of June. A Covid-19 Health Protection Board had been set up and had met to coordinate activity. A Test & Trace Operational Control Centre would coordinate all activity across Suffolk commencing 22 June, based at Endeavour House and operating 7 days a week to take enquiries, manage the flow of information and provide expert support for those local Officers investigating any outbreaks notified in the county. An officer from the team had been supporting a Suffolk-wide working

group on Covid related safety issues in public open spaces working closely with the police and other local authority representatives. This was now being supported by a working group at the Council, led by Paul Wood, which was managing funding to enable the safe opening of high streets.

The Corporate Health & Safety Team had been working hard to provide advice on infection control for Council staff and carrying out risk assessments and advising on adaptations to the Council offices to enable them to open safely.

The focus of the Food & Safety Team had been on dealing with the new regulations and government guidance on COVID-19, business closures and, more recently, the advice to businesses that can now open to ensure they do so safely. The team is getting 4-5 complaints a day about businesses that have opened but should still be closed or businesses that are not enforcing social distancing requirements or taking the other necessary precautions to control the spread of the infection. The proactive programme of inspections has been suspended while most food businesses remain closed and the FSA have advised that remote interventions with businesses in high risk situations be conducted, if necessary. As food businesses such as pubs, cafes and restaurants start to reopen in July the team will be very busy giving advice on Covid controls and will gradually return to business as usual.

The Cabinet Member said the team was trialling remote interventions with food businesses and the initial feedback had been very positive both from officers and the businesses. A large proportion of the time spent carrying out a food premises inspection was talking through the food safety management systems and this part of the visit could be done just as effectively remotely. Officers have been using Zoom calls with business operators to talk through their controls and then following that up with a much shorter site visit to verify what they have been told and to carry out a physical check for cleanliness etc. If the trial proves successful, this approach may continue in the future for certain types of food business.

The Chairman thanked the Cabinet Member for her comprehensive and thorough update. He invited questions.

A member of the Committee welcomed the Council's involvement in the test and track. He also welcomed the support being provided to licensees of pubs and hoped it might be possible to allow the use of public green spaces for patrons of pubs to sit on. Another Councillor echoed these comments and said that pubs needed as much footfall as possible in order to remain viable.

Another member of the Committee referred to a potential no-deal Brexit and what impact this might have on Port Health. The Cabinet Member said regular meetings were held to discuss these issues; however, the guidance of central government was awaited in this regard.

A further member of the Committee asked if hand-washing facilities in restaurants and pubs could be located outside of toilet areas for improved hygiene and if this could be suggested or discussed. The Cabinet Member said she would provide a response outside of the meeting.

In response to a question by the Chairman about the income generated from PHILIS, the Cabinet Member said this was ring-fenced for Port Health purposes and was not within the general fund. The Strategic Director said some 85% of ports in the UK now used PHILIS.

There being no further questions, the Chairman thanked the Cabinet Member for her thorough and comprehensive update.

5 Scrutiny Committee's Forward Work Programme

The Scrutiny Committee received and reviewed its current forward work programme. It was agreed that the item on rent arrears, which had been suggested by the former Shadow Scrutiny Committee, would be added to the list of suggested future topics and considered again at a later date. Following an enquiry by Councillor Topping, it was agreed that a scoping form on Littering would be provided to a future meeting for consideration; the form to be provided by Councillor Topping and Councillor Gooch.

The meeting concluded at 9:03 pm

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Chairman