



Minutes of the meeting of the COMMUNITY AND HOUSING SCRUTINY COMMITTEE held on TUESDAY 30 NOVEMBER 2021 at 19:15

- Present:** Councillors Balazs, Ferrans (Chair), Hume, Marlow, McLean (substituting for De Villiers), Reilly, Nazir, and Wallis
- Officers:** M Marshman (Head of Partnerships and Resilience), M Hancock (Group Head of Commissioning), T Chapman (Lead Commissioner, Housing), S Gonsalves (Director of Policy, Insight and Communications), E Richardson (Overview and Scrutiny Officer)
- Also Present:** Councillor Townsend (Cabinet Member Public Realm), S Burke (MK-ACT), M Tarbit (Area Commander Milton Keynes, Thames Valley Police), N Glister (Chair, Milton Keynes Domestic Abuse Partnership)
- Apologies:** Councillor De Villiers (Councillor McLean substituting), Councillor Fuller

CH15 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no Declarations of Interest.

CH16 MINUTES

RESOLVED -

That the Minutes of the meeting of the Community and Housing Scrutiny Committee held on 8 September 2021 be signed by the Chair as a correct record.

CH17 COMMUNITY SAFETY STRATEGIC ASSESSMENT 2020/21

Witnesses: M Marshman (Head of Partnerships and Resilience), M Tarbit (Area Commander Milton Keynes, Thames Valley Police)

The Committee received a presentation from the Council's Head of Partnerships and Resilience, which explained what a Community Safety Partnership was, the statutory requirement for a Community Safety Partnership, how it operated and its key responsibilities. Her presentation also included information on the Annual Strategic Assessment, the new Community Safety Strategy, the recommended

priorities, areas for further work, work in progress, the next steps to develop the new strategy and public and stakeholder consultation.

In answer to questions on the presentation the Committee noted that:

- a) There was no set number of priorities for the Community Safety Strategy, but any priorities listed needed to be achievable. Even if an area of concern was not listed as a priority, it did not mean that work wasn't being done;
- b) Modern day slavery was a tricky subject due to limited information and evidence; further work on this would include a scoping exercise to understand the issues and then develop an action plan. This work would not be complete by the time the new strategy was published, but it would be reported through the Community Safety Risk Board and the MK Together structure;
- c) In relation to modern slavery there was cross-cutting with serious violence, risks to vulnerable children getting involved in county drug lines, as well as sexual exploitation;
- d) Milton Keynes Council had committed significant funding (£100k in 2019/20 and £250k in 2020/21) to support a range of activities engaging with young people who might otherwise be at risk of becoming involved in harmful or criminal activities. The various schemes set up as part of this initiative were expected to report on their outcomes so that SaferMK and the Council could work out what the benefit was to the local community in return for the investment;
- e) A pro-choices programme had been delivered in schools by the Milton Keynes Safety Centre (Hazard Alley) to help young people make good decisions;
- f) As drug and alcohol misuse was at the root of a lot of crime in Milton Keynes, this would be included as a cross-cutting theme in the strategy, rather than being a separate priority.

RESOLVED –

1. That the Council's Head of Partnerships and Resilience be thanked for her presentation on the work done to turn the Community Safety Strategic Assessment into a Community Safety Strategy.
2. That the Thames Valley Police Area Commander for Milton Keynes also be thanked for his contribution to the Committee's scrutiny of this item.

3. That the Committee endorses the priorities set out in the Community Safety Strategic Assessment 2020/21 and the work being carried out to develop these into the Community Safety Strategy 2022-28.

CH18

SERIOUS VIOLENCE REDUCTION STRATEGY 2021-2024

Witness: M Tarbit (Local Police Area Commander - Milton Keynes, Thames Valley Police)

The Committee received a short presentation from Superintendent Tarbit highlighting the key points of the Serious Violence Reduction Strategy, which included governance, shared information and intelligence, early intervention and prevention, drugs and county lines, community engagement and support, law enforcement.

The Committee then discussed the points raised in the presentation with Superintendent Tarbit, noting that:

- a) Recent research indicated that 5% of geographic locations accounted for 50% all crime. Targeting areas that had long-term associations with violent crime should have a more positive impact in reducing crime;
- b) A lot of work was being done to investigate and disrupt the activities of drug lines and understand how they operated. Significant absence from school by young people was often an indication of a range of vulnerabilities and crime issues involving young people. Work was being done in schools in Milton Keynes by the Schools Liaison Officers to alert students to the dangers and warning signs of involvement by others;
- c) Thames Valley Police had the lowest levels of serious violent crime, including knife crime, of all 43 police forces in the country, with an 18% reduction in serious violence in Milton Keynes during the past year;
- d) Work was being done within the night-time economy in Milton Keynes to identify predatory males who might be looking to take advantage of vulnerable women. The police worked with local authority licencing officers to make sure that venues had rigorous plans in place to keep their patrons safe;
- e) From April 2022 the Council would be providing more training for taxi and private hire drivers to help them recognise signs of child abuse, domestic abuse, human trafficking, modern slavery, exploitation of children and extremism and help them to report any suspicions they may have;

- f) Locally, most incidences of violence were committed by under-25s. The level of violence started to tail off as people grew up and settled down with responsibilities such as jobs and families;
- g) The development of the strategy had been a collaborative piece of work between a number of agencies and the third sector. The aim was to maximise resources by prioritising which areas of crime on which to focus, and calling on support, skills and expertise from across the Thames Valley force, not just Milton Keynes, when needed;
- h) As part of the government's increase in the number of police officers, 35 new response officers were being deployed in Milton Keynes, although this probably only restored local policing to the level it had been 10 years ago;
- i) Once the evidence from the work being done to target crime hotspots, which was being used as a randomised control trial was available, Superintendent Tarbit would be happy to share it with the Committee.

RESOLVED –

1. That the Thames Valley Police Area Commander for Milton Keynes be thanked for his presentation and contribution to the Committee's scrutiny of this item.
2. That the Committee welcomes the MK Together Management Board's plans to reduce the level of serious, violent crime in Milton Keynes as set out in the Serious Violence Reduction Strategy 2021-24.
3. That the Committee notes that the Police were focussing their efforts on "hotspots" of serious violent crime, but questions the effectiveness of this approach, given that only a small proportion of the violent crime in Milton Keynes happened in those hotspots and therefore asks for benchmarking or analysis of the results from the hotspots compared to the results from other areas of Milton Keynes to be carried out.

CH19

DOMESTIC ABUSE STRATEGY 2020-25

Witnesses: N Glister (Chair of the Milton Keynes Domestic Abuse Partnership), M Hancock (Group Head of Commissioning), S Burke (MK-ACT)

The Committee received an introductory presentation from the Chair of the Milton Keynes Domestic Abuse Partnership. He explained that he had been in post as Chair for just over year, and that work on the

strategy had been well advanced when he took over. He said that he had been very impressed with the high level of input, commitment, and co-operation of all those involved in developing the strategy.

He went on to highlight the four main priorities of the strategy, ie, raising expectations, inclusive access, empowering victims and making perpetrators accountable, the interventions that would be needed to achieve these and the expected outcomes for each priority. The strategy's vision was to ensure that Milton Keynes was a place where domestic abuse was not tolerated and where everyone could expect to have healthy and fulfilling relationships. He added that an action plan had been developed to prioritise the work which would be driven by the operational group on the Domestic Abuse Partnership and a co-ordinator had been appointed to lead the work.

The Committee then heard from the Council's Group Head of Commissioning who advised the Committee of some of the additional initiatives around domestic abuse prevention the Council had been able to put in place due to the extra government funding it had received in relation to the Domestic Abuse Act. A lot of work had been done recently on raising awareness of domestic abuse issues generally and particularly those related to the pandemic. Work was also being done to review the available digital information on domestic abuse and how this could be improved.

In response to questions the Committee noted that:

- a) One of the limiting factors in bringing successful prosecutions for domestic abuse was whether the victim was willing to support a prosecution. Victims were generally reluctant to report incidents and often later withdrew the allegations. One of the strands of the partnership's work was to build victim confidence by putting them in an environment where they did not feel under threat;
- b) MK-Act offered a 'Fresh Start' service which included a community-based programme to help perpetrators recognise and accept responsibility for their role in the abuse. The programme included either group programmes or 1-2-1 sessions and was separate from anything perpetrators might be involved in through the criminal justice system. Participants needed to be self-motivated in order to participate successfully. The programme also provided support for partners / ex-partners to make them feel safer;
- c) The Council was looking at best practice across the country in order to understand what worked and what didn't to change the

behavioural patterns of perpetrators and their victims and had commissioned a review of existing programmes;

- d) Work was being done in partnership with Milton Keynes College and Thames Valley Police to help hairdressers to recognise signs of domestic abuse from conversations with their clients and provide guidance on how to deal with it. The professional helpline provided by MK-Act wasn't just for victims to report abuse, it also provided guidance to anyone who reported suspicions that a family member, friend, colleague, client etc might be being subjected to domestic abuse;
- e) The Council was starting work to improve both the information available on its website to assist victims of domestic abuse access the right help and support and make it easier to find. There was also a need to make sure that this information was consistent across all the members of the partnership and any other agencies involved in providing support for the victims of domestic abuse;
- f) The level of engagement with domestic abuse support services by the different communities within Milton Keynes was variable. Victims, particularly from the BAME community often faced additional barriers and vulnerabilities, including "honour" elements to the abuse, family pressures, or multiple perpetrators. MK-ACT encouraged self-referrals from all groups and tried to ensure that their staff reflected local communities to encourage access by harder to reach groups;
- g) MK-ACT did record the length of time abuse was being carried out before a victim sought help. Its database was linked to the national Women's Aid database, which collected and anonymised data to show national trends. The figures for Milton Keynes were fairly average compared to the rest of country, being neither much higher nor much lower than elsewhere.

Finally, the Committee heard from Councillor Townsend, Cabinet Member for Public Realm, who praised the work of everyone involved in the various aspects of local community safety that the Committee had been scrutinising. She added that the new co-ordinator appointed by the Council to oversee the strategy had hit the ground running and that there was a lot of work being done to improve local community safety, although there was always more to do.

RESOLVED –

1. That the Chair of the Milton Keynes Domestic Abuse Partnership be thanked for his presentation and contribution to the Committee's scrutiny of this item.
2. That the Chief Executive of MK-ACT and the Council's Group Head of Commissioning also be thanked for their contributions to the Committee's scrutiny of this item.
3. That the Committee welcomes the close co-operation between the various partners involved in both developing the strategy and working together to ensure that it is being implemented properly to ensure the best possible outcomes for the victims of domestic abuse in Milton Keynes.
4. That the Committee welcomes the review of the on-line presence of Domestic Abuse support services to increase empowerment of victims by enabling them to access the help they need.

CH20

2021/22 WORK PROGRAMME

The Committee considered the proposed agenda for the meeting scheduled for 2 March 2022. The Chair drew the Committee's attention to the list of items in the Work Programme which hadn't been allocated meeting time during 2021/2022 and asked it to consider whether it wished to carry them over to the 2022/23 cycle of meetings and to advise the Planning Group of any other items it wished to consider next year.

The Overview and Scrutiny Officer advised that she was discussing a possible site visit by the Committee to the YMCA's new campus.

RESOLVED –

1. That the Committee notes the proposed items as discussed in the meeting for the meeting scheduled for 2 March 2022.
2. That members of the Committee are invited to suggest to the Planning Group (Chair, Vice-Chairs, Scrutiny Officer) any possible items for scrutiny during the 2022/23 cycle of meetings.

THE CHAIR CLOSED THE MEETING AT 21:09 PM

All the presentations referred to in this document can be found on the Council's Committee Management Information System (CMIS) at: [CMIS: Community and Housing Scrutiny Committee - 30 November 2021](#)

The recording of this meeting is available to view on the Council's YouTube Channel at: [Milton Keynes Council YouTube Channel: Community & Housing Scrutiny Committee - 30 November 2021](#)

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