

## OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

21 February 2024

Present: Councillor A Grimston (Chair)  
Councillor F Ezeifedi (Vice-Chair)  
Councillors M Devonish, P Jeffree, P Kloss, L Nembhard MBE and  
T Osborn

Also present: Councillor Aga Dychton  
Inspector Dan Jones, Hertfordshire Constabulary

Officers: Associate Director of Planning, Infrastructure and Economy  
Community Protection Lead  
Community Safety Manager  
Senior Democratic Services Officer

### 77 **Apologies for Absence/Committee Membership**

Apologies for absence had been received from Councillors Ahmed and Khan.

There was a change of membership for this meeting; Councillor Jeffree replaced Councillor Hill.

The committee sent their congratulations to Councillor Hill on the arrival of her baby.

### 78 **Disclosure of interests (if any)**

There were no disclosures of interest.

### 79 **Minutes**

The minutes of the meeting held on 31 January 2024 were submitted and signed.

### 80 **Community Safety Partnership update**

The committee received a presentation of the Community Protection Lead, the Community Safety Manager and Inspector Dan Jones.

The presentation covered the role of the Community Safety Partnership (CSP), the partnership's current priorities (serious violent crime, violence against women and girls, community wellbeing and reassurance and inform), actions undertaken to deliver the against the priorities, the future reporting structure of the partnership, the risk matrix, proposed new priorities, antisocial behaviour (ASB) case reviews, the policing update and crime data.

The officers and the police also addressed areas that committee members had highlighted in advance as concerns:

- There had been a peak in youth ASB in Atria when the schools had broken up for the summer holidays. The police had used dispersal powers and worked with local schools to agree staggered finishing times in the future. A plan would be in place to address any potential repeat of the issues.
- The partnership used 'heat maps' to identify patterns in localised ASB and emerging issues were addressed at the weekly partnership meeting.
- There had been a focus in addressing the issue of street drinkers congregating in St Mary's Churchyard. The relocation of the police station to nearby George Street also afforded the police more opportunities to oversee the area. Should there be an increase in the summer months, civil orders could be utilised.
- Members of the Neighbourhood Policing Team had been trained in the use of speed cameras and these could be used to address issues identified with speeding on St Albans Road. It was noted that the issues raised with speeding often took place overnight.
- Funding had been secured for more lighting in Cassiobury Park which was now well-covered. No further requests had been received and the partnership would react should concerns be raised.
- Women's shelters had provisions to provide cash for essentials for victims of domestic abuse until they were able to open a new account. The Community Safety Manager undertook to discuss the issue with the Sunflower Centre and the BID and look to progress any actions under the Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG) strategy. It was noted that prepayment cards might be a useful alternative.

The committee then had a wider discussion of the CSP:

- A new Hertfordshire-wide community safety app would be launched in April 2024 and details would be circulated to councillors.
- The reprofiling of the VAWG priority reflected the reduction in the risk rating and the trend of falling numbers of offences. It would remain under the Community Wellbeing priority and the tools and strategies developed would remain in place. While it was not a key driver for crime, the significant impact on individuals was recognised even if the risk to the community was reduced. It had remained as a priority for an additional

- year to ensure that the downward trend was continuing. Should there be an uptick in sexual offences the risk level and priorities would be reviewed.
- Where drugs were involved in incidences of ASB, this was reflected in the data. Increases in data around drug offences usually reflected increased searches or reporting. ASB itself had reduced from approximately 6,200 incidences per year in 2012 to 2,800 now. A lot of low-level ASB was now dealt with by partners, including Watford Community Housing.
  - The partnership used the Safety Net system to monitor ASB and prioritise responses. There was a closure order in place in one property on the Meriden and daily patrols were undertaken. The response was integrated with partners and was both overt and covert and included engaging with younger people in the community.
  - Any issues in Cassiobury Park tended to be seasonal and were effectively monitored. The police responded to demand and deployed officers accordingly. The police would attend major events in the park and were keen to foster joint patrols with other agencies. It was noted that local councillors were keen to engage with the police on local community events.
  - The Hollie Guard app provided a personal safety service and the police promoted it to young people, but they did not receive data from the app.
  - Residents could request an ASB Case Review (Community Trigger), alternatively a councillor or other representative could request it on behalf of someone else. Councillors provided a helpful independent overview of the process and Beacon victim services were also involved to ensure the quality of the response.
  - Some areas had seen a high turnover in PCSOs, this was often because they could be posted anywhere and sometimes chose to go on to become a police officer.
  - Watford was fortunate that records of hate crime had not followed national trends. The police were sensitive to potential community tensions and were in regular contact with local religious leaders. Watford's demography was different to the rest of Hertfordshire and the communities were well-integrated. While race hate crimes were down 19% overall; the hospital was one hotspot with patients being aggressive to staff. PCSOs worked with the hospital to drive forward reports. Other sources of race hate crimes included by those apprehended for acquisitive crimes and those targeting civil enforcement officers.
  - The changes to the nighttime economy reflected wider societal changes. There was a shift towards smaller venues and particularly those with an entertainment offer. Watford's town centre policing no longer required officer support from other areas of the county. Establishments were better run and there was a more proactive approach.
  - Observationally, there was a large variation in the demographics of perpetrators of different crime types.

- A query was raised about the drivers behind the thefts of pedal bikes in the area; this would be considered at a future meeting.

The Portfolio Holder also expressed her thanks to officers and the police for all they had achieved. She provided reassurances that VAWG would remain on the agenda and that robust strategies were in place.

The committee thanked the officers and the police for their presentation.

RESOLVED –

that a further review of the work of the CSP be undertaken in autumn/winter 2024.

## 81 **Social Housing Task Group final report**

The committee received the final report of the Social Housing Task Group. The Chair of Overview and Scrutiny Committee, a member of the task group, introduced the report.

She noted that it had been a really encouraging piece of work and that there had been an open and collaborative approach demonstrated. The culture of openness meant that issues could be more quickly addressed.

Councillor Devonish, who also sat on the task group, concurred that it had been productive. She praised initiatives like the Big Door Knock which helped tenants to have more control and also engaged tenants who did not make regular contact with their landlord. It had been helpful to know that underperforming contractors were not being retained. She thanked the registered providers who had also given written feedback.

RESOLVED-

that the final report and recommendations of the task group be agreed and forwarded to relevant registered providers.

## 82 **Call-in**

There had been no items called-in.

83 **Executive Decision Progress Report**

The scrutiny committee was invited to review the current Executive Decision Progress Report for 2023-24 and consider whether any further information was required.

RESOLVED –

that the current 2023/24 Executive Decision Progress report be noted.

84 **Hertfordshire County Council's Health Scrutiny Committee**

The Chair reported that the Health Scrutiny Committee had not met.

The committee discussed the increase in excess deaths that had been evidenced on an international scale and what impact that might have in Watford. It was noted that Covid still had an impact on the way people accessed healthcare services. The new hospital would be paramount in delivering health services locally. The Chair agreed she would raise this at the next meeting.

RESOLVED –

the update be noted.

85 **Work Programme**

Members were invited to review Overview and Scrutiny Committee's draft work programme for 2023/24.

There was a discussion about the impact of bins on streets with narrow pavements. It was agreed that this would be raised separately with Veolia.

RESOLVED –

that the work programme is noted.

86 **Date of Next Meeting**

The next meeting would be on Wednesday 13 March 2024.

Chair

The Meeting started at 7.05 pm  
and finished at 8.40 pm