

MINUTES of the meeting of the Cleaner, Greener and Safer Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 21 September 2010 at 7.00pm.

8. POLICE COMMUNITY SUPPORT OFFICERS (PCSOs)

The Council match funded 14 PCSO posts. This was a discretionary service that was currently being considered as a budget saving. Chief Inspector Moor explained to the Committee that a PCSO was different to a police officer but the two roles complimented each other well. The PCSO was employed to support the community and be a visible uniformed presence. Their primary role was not to enforce and they were instrumental in visiting youth clubs and community forums. In essence, they were the eyes and ears of the community and their effectiveness and coverage had been improved through the introduction on push bikes.

The performance indicators and acronyms contained in the report were explained to the Committee and Councillors Tolson and Stone spoke of their experiences on their research day into PCSOs. Councillor Stone said the feedback from residents in Grays was fantastic and praised the work of PCSOs. Councillor Tolson explained there was a mixed reaction in the Homesteads ward with people saying they never saw them and other businesses and residents describing the good work the PCSOs had already done.

There was a brief discussion on the moving of PCSOs around the borough. It was explained that PCSOs were attached to a specific area but were sometimes used in other areas across Essex where greater support was needed, for example, during outdoor events or major police operations.

Members were assured that PCSOs from South Ockendon would not be posted inside Lakeside for the Christmas period. Lakeside paid for its own compliment of Police and PCSOs but during Christmas, the police naturally concentrated its efforts on the Lakeside/ West Thurrock area as this was a major area of criminal activity. Regular police officers were posted to this area more than PCSOs but because of a new training regime for new recruits, which delayed them from starting active duty, there would be a need for some PCSOs to be present in the Lakeside area over Christmas. However, this would not be for the entire Christmas period and only in a supporting role to regular officers.

During the discussion it was highlighted that Thurrock had a low crime rate compared to the national picture and although Lakeside impacted on figures, it was not as big a problem as public opinion believed.

Some Members expressed their approval of PCSO performance but stated that there should be a closer relationship between the councillors and the PCSOs. The Chief Inspector agreed that councillors should be part of a PCSO's key individual network (KIN). It was generally agreed that young people and the elderly were the people in a community who would interact with a PCSO the most.

In response to a query on why PCSO turnover was high in some areas it was explained that a portion of PCSOs became regular police officers and also there were a few who had gone on maternity leave.

The Chair felt that the PCSOs could do more to enforce laws on dog fouling and littering and that their attendance at public meetings may not serve the community in the best way. The Chair also wondered whether it was possible to increase the powers of the PCSO to include fining people for not wearing seatbelts. The Chief Inspector responded that the PCSOs were only given certain powers by the law and they could not be changed, however, he agreed that it would be helpful to increase PCSO powers. Essex PCSOs had most of the powers allowed under law. In respect of PCSOs attending meetings, to which the Chair highlighted that PCSOs had attended 65 community meetings in August, the Chief Inspector stated that the PCSOs did whatever the community wanted them to do and if that was to issue more fines, then they would do that. It was suggested that the PCSOs could perhaps

have a more structured work schedule that included patrol plans and targeted actions in defined geographical areas.

In relation to public spaces it was added that Essex Police had successfully piloted a scheme in Ockendon to prevent littering and anti-social behaviour in parks which would be extended to the rest of Thurrock.

The Chair asked a number of ward specific issues relating to Corringham police station and the use of scramble bikes. It was responded that only the front office hours of Corringham police station had been reduced. This reduction had little impact on the reporting of crime as the majority of this work came through telephone and email, rather than face to face contact at the station. The use of PCSOs to tackle scramble bikes was improved since push bikes were introduced but this remained an issue for the police across Thurrock.

A brief discussion was had on the viability of the Council maintaining the funding for PCSOs. The Chief Inspector speculated that Thurrock was a key area in Essex that the Police would not be inclined to reduce frontline services but budget pressures were a reality. The Committee generally agreed that PCSOs were useful in their communities, even though they were utilised in different ways across Thurrock.

RESOLVED: That:

- i) The committee recognise the important role PCSOs play in the community and where possible this service should remain.**
- ii) Following the budget consultation, if PCSO funding is to be reduced, then the Council and Police work together to ensure that what limited resources are available are used to the best effect.**
- iii) If PCSOs are reduced due to future budget decisions that a staggered reduction in posts is undertaken so a**