REPORT of
DIRECTOR OF CUSTOMERS AND COMMUNITY
to
COUNCIL
17 DECEMBER 2015

ESSEX POLICE REVIEW

1. PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

1.1 To update Members on work undertaken by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee (acting as the Crime and Disorder Committee) (OSCDC).

1.2 To make recommendations to Council following a scrutiny of the implications of the changes recently announced by Essex Police upon the Maldon District.

2. AREA FOR DECISION / ACTION

2.1 Background

2.1.1 At the meeting of the OSCDC on the 7 October 2015 it was decided to form a working group to consider the implications of the recently announced Essex Police Review (Minute No. 475 refers). The following Members of the Committee formed the Working Group:

- Councillor A S Fluker (Chairman)
- Councillor S J Savage (Vice-Chairman)
- Councillor E L Bamford
- Councillor H M Bass
- Councillor Mrs P A Channer
- Councillor M R Heard (resigned after the initial meeting of the Working Group)
- Councillor M W Helm

2.1.2 The working group reviewed the documentation provided by the Police and Crime Commissioner (PCC) and Chief Constable relating to the review of Policing in Essex announced on 6 October 2015. Copies of the documentation can be found at APPENDIX 1.

2.1.3 The Essex Police Review Task and Finish Working Group (EPRTFWG) also inspected the Maldon and Essex Police Performance Summary to September 2015. The documentation details recorded crime and includes details of detection rates for the Maldon District to set the context against which to consider the impact of the
proposed changes. Copies of the performance summaries are attached at **APPENDIX 2**.

2.1.4 The working group also considered the Government grants and precepted grants for the period 2008 / 09 – 2015 / 16 attached at **APPENDIX 3**.

2.2 **Implications for the Maldon District**

2.2.1 The implications for the Maldon District as a result of the proposed changes to policing include the closure of the Southminster Police Station, revisions to opening hours of the Maldon Police Station and a reduction from 31 Police Community Support Officer (PCSOs) posts within the Chelmsford and Maldon Policing Division to 7.

2.2.2 Other changes proposed include a new Community Policing Team for Maldon and Chelmsford which will be made up of a Local Policing and Partnerships Inspector, two Sergeants, ten Constables, and one dedicated Youth Officer who will join the remaining seven PCSOs.

2.3 **Scrutiny of Decisions taken by the PCC and Chief Constable**

2.3.1 On the 17 November 2015 the OSCDC undertook a scrutiny of the proposed changes. Invitations to attend were sent to the Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner (PCC), Essex Police, the Home Office and former members of the Essex Police Authority. Attending the committee on the 17 November were Mr Nick Alston (PCC), Superintendent Steve Ditchburn and Chief Inspector Alan Cook both from Essex Police. The Home Office declined the invitation to attend stating it would not be appropriate as they were not responsible for local budget decisions. Officers responded to the response reminding the Home Office that the Council was trying to understand the budget allocations made to Essex Police which was their area of responsibility. The Home Office then responded declining the invitation due to previous diary commitments.

2.3.2 The scrutiny exercise was based upon a number of themes (set out below) designed to understand the thinking behind the decision to make changes to policing within the District as outlined within this report.

2.3.3 Understanding the financial background leading to the need to reduce spending by Essex Police

2.3.3.1 Members directed questions to understand what steps the PCC had taken to address the budget shortfall, understand the reasons why Essex Police were under funded by the Home Office in comparison to other Counties and why the police property estate had such a large maintenance backlog. In response, the PCC explained all police forces are facing the same pressure from Central Government. Factors included the historic low level of County wide precept agreed by the Essex Police Authority (EPA) (Essex is one of the lowest) combined with no cash reserves and the fact that the EPA appeared not to have taken steps to protect the tax base. The PCC has been in personal contact with the Home Secretary regarding funding for Essex Police making the argument regarding the historic low precept and the need for some support to address the shortfall. In 2009 Essex Police took a position to collaborate with Kent
Police and now have a combined establishment e.g. human resources / estates / finance etc. As a result Essex is more efficient than any other authority in the country in this respect. With regard to the property backlog the PCC confirmed he inherited a poor stock and it has taken some time to formulate the plan to address the issue due in part to higher priorities. It was noted that the precepted contribution from district household was approximately £4m. (This is a rough figure based on 26,000 households within the Maldon district paying £147 per annum).

2.3.4 Understanding the rationale used for the proposed changes within the Maldon District

2.3.4.1 Members sought an assurance that the proposed changes to policing in the District took account of the rural and peninsular nature of the area when deciding upon the level of resource allocated. Concerns were expressed about response times by police within the Dengie, the level of crime and the poor detection rate highlighted within data provided to the Council. In response the PCC and police officers sought to explain how police resources would be deployed in the future and acknowledged that the detection rate needed improvement. The PCC reminded Members that Maldon has the lowest crime area in Essex, for example house burglaries – 85 in a year and felt this was an incredibly low number. Given the low number of crimes within the district Police resources had to be allocated against that fact. The PCC also highlighted the need to move towards Community Safety Hubs in the future to pull together a number of agencies working on keeping residents safe and protected.

2.3.5 Consideration of alternatives to reducing front line policing

2.3.5.1 Discussions took place on issues such as procurement, air operations and office functions. The PCC highlighted the joint work with Kent Police, the joined up approach to procurement which has delivered real savings with particular reference made to the vehicle fleet. Air operations are now part of a national service and Essex now makes a contribution towards running costs which as a result has reduced overall costs. In response to Member questions, the PCC could not confirm the exact cost saving at the meeting.

2.3.6 Use of technology

2.3.6.1 Members noted the desire for the police to modernise and through the use of technology be able to contact the police and report crime on line through the use of a number of portable devices. However, Members reminded the PCC that this district does have an ageing population some of which may not have access to technology. In response an assurance was given that access by telephone will be maintained and the public will be given access to the police service in a number of different ways. Whist being able to speak to a PCSO or Police Officer was perhaps the preferred method by many but this was not realistic given the current constraints.

2.3.6.2 Members then asked a question relating to the provision of automatic number plate recognition cameras (ANPR). The Council was informed that funding had been provided to Essex Police some time ago to facilitate the installation of ANPR cameras within the Dengie but to date they have not materialised. Chief Inspector Cook confirmed that the funding for the ANPR cameras had been received but was not certain when they were to be installed. Members reminded Chief Inspector Cook this matter had been outstanding for a considerable time.
2.3.7 Impact of changes within the community.

2.3.7.1 Members sought an explanation into the actual level of policing resources within the District under the proposal. The Police Superintendent confirmed (it was likely) the Community Policing Team would be based in Chelmsford. The challenge for Chief Inspector Cook was to make sure that Maldon still sees share of that resource. The Chief Inspector explained the proposed new team would be too small in terms of critical mass to be divided up which would make it less effective. Members sought clarity on which officers would be based in Maldon. The Chief Inspector confirmed the local response teams would be maintained and would be based at Maldon Police Station. It was further clarified that some of the duties currently performed by the Community Policing Team would in time migrate to the Council. This change is linked to changes in legislation relating to Anti-Social Behaviour (ASB). In future the Police intend to base their response on a risk based decision making basis meaning lower level ASB cases would be dealt with directly by the Council. This change is understood and the Council increased resources this year following a successful growth bid to increase the hours of the Council’s ASB Officer to full time. The Committee sought clarification of the recently announced Essex Police and Essex County Fire & Rescue Service Parish Safety and Home Safety Scheme which is based upon the use of volunteers. Those present were oblivious to the scheme and could not assist which does raise concerns regarding coordination between the emergency services.

2.3.8 Lack of formal consultation and input from partners prior to the announcement of changes

2.3.8.1 Members asked why communities were not consulted in advance of the announcement on the proposals. In response, the PCC confirmed he has no obligation to consult with partners. The PCC explained the key issue was consulting with members of staff affected. The PCC agreed the timing of the announcement was poorly considered and not ideal for partner organisations and went onto explain that he had hoped to make the announcement several weeks earlier. The PCC explained given the sensitivity of the matter and the need to consult with a large number of Police Community Support Officers directly affected by the proposal this had led to a delay in the announcement. The PCC re stated that regardless of the lack of pre consultation into the proposals he was keen to meet with partner organisations to explain the rational and reasons behind the changes being proposed.

3. IMPACT ON CORPORATE GOALS

3.1 These priorities contribute to the Council’s Corporate Goal of “Helping communities to be safe, active and healthy”

4. IMPLICATIONS

(i) Impact on Customers – The Maldon District is rural in nature and consists of a number of isolated communities especially within the Dengie peninsular. The reduction of visible policing remains a concern locally and the impact of the proposed changes are yet to be understood.
(ii) **Impact on Equalities** – None.

(iii) **Impact on Risk** – None.

(iv) **Impact on Resources (financial)** – Members should note that the Council makes a significant financial contribution to the Community Safety Partnership and also funds a number of discretionary services which support the community (e.g. Park Ranger Team). The impact of the proposed changes in the workload of the Council is yet to be understood but could impact upon the Community Safety Team, Park Rangers, Street Scene Officers and housing services amongst others.

(v) **Impact on Resources (human)** – As above.

(vi) **Impact on the Environment** – None.

5. **CONCLUSIONS**

5.1 The OSCDC has undertaken a thorough review of the proposed changes to policing and the impact this may have within the Maldon District. Members sought assurances that the level of resources to be allocated is appropriate and takes account of our geography, rural nature and types of crime that are prevalent in the District.

5.2 The PCC and officers from Essex Police noted concerns from Members and sought to reassure that the Maldon District is one of the safest places within Essex to live and was firmly committed to providing an appropriate level of resources in the future. This desire was evidenced through the proposed close future working through community hubs and the officers from Essex Police acknowledged that the Police would need a culture shift in terms of how they work with partners to enable community hubs to be successful.

5.3 The proposed changes will come into effect from April of next year. To enable the changes to be monitored for impact it will be necessary to develop indicators to measure performance at a local level. These indicators could include details of public contact with the Police (and via which channel), response times to incidents all set against the normal performance and crime figures.

5.4 The proposal to develop Community Safety Hubs to work in partnership with the Police will need to be developed to ensure it is effective and contributes to safety within the Maldon District without placing undue burden on this Council.

5.5 The impact upon the Council and its services is still unclear but it is possible that the Community will turn to the Council for support with front line teams becoming perhaps the first point of contact for non 999 responses. This will need careful management and monitoring as the changes come into effect.
6. RECOMMENDATIONS

(i) that Members note the scrutiny undertaken by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee (acting as the Crime and Disorder Committee on the 18 November 2015;

(ii) that the Director of Customers and Community develops a set of local performance indicators in consultation with Essex Police to monitor the impact of the changes from April next year and these be reported through the normal performance management process;

(iii) that the Director of Customers and Community writes to Essex Police asking for confirmation of the exact location and proposed date of installation of the externally funded Automatic Number Plate Recognition cameras within the District;

(iv) that the Director of Customers and Community writes to the Police and Crime Commissioner to ask why the decision to close Southminster Police Station could not have been the subject of a separate consultation exercise;

(v) that the Overview and Scrutiny Committee (acting as the Crime and Disorder Committee) reviews the changes implemented after six months and reports back to Council on the findings;

(vi) that Members note the discussions relating to community hubs and that progress will be reported to Members as the proposal develops.

Background Papers: None.

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