

Overview & Scrutiny Committee – Meeting held on Wednesday, 4th November, 2020.

Present:- Councillors Dhaliwal (Chair), Mohammad (Vice-Chair), Basra, Gahir, Hulme, Matloob, D Parmar and S Parmar

Also present under Rule 30:- Councillors Nazir and Strutton

Apologies for Absence:- Councillor Sarfraz

PART I

36. Declarations of Interest

None were declared.

37. Minutes of the Last Meeting held on 10th September 2020

Resolved - That the minutes of the meeting held on 10th September 2020 be approved as a correct record.

38. Member Questions

None had been received.

39. Presentation from the Thames Valley Police and Crime Commissioner and Chief Constable

The Chair welcomed Anthony Stansfeld, Thames Valley Police and Crime Commissioner (PCC), Chief Constable John Campbell and Superintendent Gavin Wong to the meeting.

Prior to receiving the presentation, the Chair commented that the slide deck that had been provided was lacking in detail and requested that in future a report outlining crime issues specific to Slough be provided to the Committee.

Chief Constable John Campbell was then invited to introduce the presentation. Members were provided with an overview of policing operations, priorities and crime trends for the Thames Valley area.

Following the conclusion of the presentation, the Chair invited Members to comment and ask questions.

The Committee had a wide-ranging discussion, during which the following points were raised:

- A Member asked if Thames Valley Police received sufficient funding and had suitable officer resource in place to deliver quality policing in Slough. The PCC explained that the distribution of funding was

Overview & Scrutiny Committee - 04.11.20

based on a grant formula. Thames Valley Police had benefitted from an increase in precept in 2019/20 and had invested in local policing and investigation. Superintendent Wong added that he was satisfied Slough received an equitable share of grant funding and there was a suitable number of police officers operational to undertake effective policing.

- It was noted that the number of Stop and Search incidents had increased by 58% during 2019/20. It was asked if data regarding the age and ethnicity of those being stopped was available. Superintendent Wong agreed to circulate this information to the Committee following the meeting.
- A Member asked if proactive measures were taken to improve the perception of the police amongst young people. In response, it was explained that Stop and Search was an effective measure that prevented people from being unnecessarily arrested. Work was being undertaken to improve public communications and the perception of Stop and Search.
- In relation to Operation RESTORE – the Covid-19 response, it was asked what particular challenges had Thames Valley Police experienced in Slough, and how did Slough compare to other parts of Thames Valley, in respect of adherence to Government guidelines and restrictions. Superintendent Wong reported that more fines had been issued in Slough than in any other area; however the number of breaches had been small. The approach adopted by the police was to ‘engage, explain and encourage’ adherence to the restrictions before taking enforcement action and issuing any fine.
- In relation to recruitment, it was asked if there were apprenticeship opportunities within the police force. It was explained that a range of training opportunities were available within the police. New recruits that did not hold a degree could join the police via a three-year apprenticeship scheme. The Chief Constable explained that he was keen to encourage applicants from a broad range of backgrounds, cultures and experiences – to ensure the police force was representative of the community.
- It was noted that the Violence Reduction Unit was funding projects until the end of March 2021 – it was asked of Thames Valley Police would be willing to support further longer-term, sustainable mentioning schemes in Slough. Superintendent Wong reported that Slough had a dedicated school police officer and the police force supported the Choices Programme which had been rolled-out across schools in the Borough. He explained that Thames Valley Police worked collaboratively with Slough Borough Council to tackle crime issues within the area.
- Concern was raised that the new Crossrail 2 railway could result in an influx of criminals travelling to Slough. Superintendent Wong explained that the police were continually mindful of changes occurring within an area and responded accordingly.
- A Member noted that there was a prevalence of violent and sexual offences in Slough - and asked what action Thames Valley Police had taken to tackle these issues. It was explained that tackling knife

Overview & Scrutiny Committee - 04.11.20

crime in Slough remained a local police area priority and that Slough had a high success rate of prosecuting offenders of sexual crimes.

- It was noted that data on the Thames Valley Police website indicated that Slough had a comparable crime rate to Oxford. Concern was raised that this indicated that Slough had a relatively excessive level of crime given that Oxford was a city. The Chief Constable explained that notwithstanding the fact Oxford was a city, the populations of Slough and Oxford were similar and Slough had areas of deprivation typically associated with cities.
- It was highlighted that a significant number of crimes occurred within Slough town centre. In view of the Council's ambition to regenerate the high street and encourage footfall - it was asked what action was being taken to improve the perception of the area. Superintendent Wong recognised the impact of anti-social behavior within the town centre and explained that he was working closely with the Council to support its regeneration plans.
- A Member asked what measures the police took to prevent cyber crime. It was explained that there was a specialist regional cyber unit that worked to promote preventative measures people could take to protect themselves from these types of crimes.
- In relation to drug related crimes, it was highlighted that whilst habitual users were often involved in criminal activity to fund their drug use; recreational users were part of the same drug network and this type of activity should be viewed as equally unacceptable as other forms of criminality.
- It was noted that Thames Valley Police needed to make £13.4 million worth of savings over the next three years – it was asked how it planned to meet this target. In response, Members were assured that there were no plans to close Slough Police Station or make cuts to the local policing resource.
- Concern was raised regarding the increased number of assaults against police officers across the Thames Valley area. Superintendent Wong explained that historically assaults had been considered 'part of the job' - however increasingly instances were being reported and the Crown Prosecution Service was supportive in prosecuting offenders.
- A Member asked if Brexit would have a detrimental impact on counter-terrorism policing. It was explained that robust transition arrangements were in place and intelligence would continue to be shared by the International Criminal Police Organisation.

The Chair then invited Councillors in attendance under Rule 30 to address the Committee.

Councillor Strutton queried why there had been a significant increase in the number of sexual offences and car thefts. He raised concerns regarding the increased incidents of: anti-social behavior, including illegal use of E-Scooters, crimes involving firearms, and violent crime occurring in Slough town centre. He urged Slough police force to work effectively with the Council's CCTV department to share information and intelligence. In

Overview & Scrutiny Committee - 04.11.20

concluding, he asked if proceeds of crime funding could be used to recruit additional police officers to improve policing in Slough.

Superintendent Wong responded to the issues raised. In relation to sexual offences he explained that there had previously been a small number of cases, therefore a small increase, expressed as a percentage, equated to a 180% increase. He explained that during lockdown more people had spent time at home and this had resulted in fewer burglaries and more car thefts. In relation to firearms, it was explained that this type of crime was uncommon and formed a small part of overall crime rates. He reported that the police worked with the Council and utilised its CCTV footage when necessary.

The Chief Constable explained that because proceeds crime funding was not guaranteed, it was not possible to use this income to recruit additional officers. Funding received was distributed to local charities that supported the reduction of crime in the local area.

Councillor Nazir said he was encouraged to hear about the excellent joint work undertaken between the police and Slough Borough Council. He thanked Superintendent Wong, the PCC and Chief Constable for their good work.

Resolved – That Cabinet be requested to consider the following recommendation:

Slough Borough Council should work with Thames Valley Police and others in the Safer Slough Partnership to develop a communications plan to improve residents' perceptions of the safety of Slough – with particular focus on the town centre - and to share examples of the positive partnership work that has already been undertaken.

40. Forward Work Programme 2020/21

Resolved - That the Forward Work Programme, as set out in Appendix A of the report be noted.

41. Members' Attendance Record 2020/21

Resolved – That the details of the Members' Attendance record be noted.

42. Date of Next Meeting - 7th January 2021

Resolved – That the date of the next meeting was confirmed as 7th January 2021.

Chair

(Note: The meeting opened at 6.30 pm and closed at 8.28 pm)