

		PAF/20/16
Committee:	People and Families Scrutiny Committee	
Date:	13 October 2016	
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The notes from the Essex Police Briefing to the People and Families Scrutiny Committee on Friday, 12 August 2016 in Committee Room 1

In attendance: Councillor's Ian Grundy (Chairman), Keith Bobbin, Jenny Chandler, Keith Gibbs, Theresa Higgins, Paul Honeywood, Ray Howard, Maggie McEwen, Jon Whitehouse, Andy Wood.

Apologies: Councillor Andy Erskine

Officers in attendance: Robert Fox, Adam Boey

Chief Constable Stephen Kavanagh and Detective Superintendent Lucy Morris from Essex Police were in attendance.

Five questions had been filed with Mr Kavanagh in advance of the meeting and he set-out his answers in his opening statement.

Question 1: What has changed 11 months on from the initial inspection?

The Chief Constable informed the Committee he took full responsibility for the findings of the Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabularies (HMIC) in the two reports in question. He stated he had looked at a number of investigations and recognised the shortfalls, particularly in the north of the county. The Independent Police Complaints Commission (IPCC) was contacted after Essex Police had looked at these cases.

Operation Maple was instigated with new investigators to look at:

- 1) how children are safeguarded from risk

- II) child protection practice
- III) the effectiveness of child protection practice
- IV) driving improvements

The HMIC report was conducted whilst these improvements were in practice. It has been raised with the HMIC that an inspection carried out in September 2015 and then published in March 2016 reduces the effectiveness of the inspection process.

A broad pattern of high risk behaviours throughout the county has been identified within children's homes. There has been a failure, within the police force, to understand that these children do not always recognise themselves as victims of crime. As a result the mindsets of officers have had to be reset. Domestic abuse responses have often had children being neglected and officers were not dealing with the children in some of these cases. Again, police officers' mindsets have had to be changed in terms of what is important for the children. All of this has had the effect of reigniting the value of what detectives in Essex do. There has been a six-fold increase in officers reporting child sexual exploitation (CSE) in the county, this shows that it is being flagged-up better by officers rather than there being a specific increase of incidents.

There is a new commitment within Essex Police and victims of these crimes have spoken about their experiences to between 1,200-1,500 police officers and other Essex Police staff.

Some £3.5-4million worth of investment has been pulled from one area of the police budget into child sexual exploitation, domestic abuse and public protection. Mr Kavanagh stated child protection, CSE and human trafficking is the responsibility of all; with the police force investing in public protection despite the force being under-funded.

With regard to the inspection on vulnerability the Committee heard that this had a wider remit than the child protection one. An improvement plan has been produced with over 400 individual areas of activity. To date, there are now under 100 remaining. The governance structure has been changed, the relationship with ECC (and the two unitary authority) social care teams are much improved and there is now full reciprocal attendance at key meetings and boards. This has become more cohesive since the appointment of the new ECC Chief Executive. There is 100 additional staff working in specialist public protection roles, showing a significant investment in staff for this area as well as training. These staff are monitored and scrutinised to ensure they have the right skills and support. Front-line uniform officers also need to understand and recognise signs of vulnerability which will require a significant culture change.

There is now a continuous cycle of training which is not just for police officers, for example there is a public protection awareness course for every member of frontline

police staff – Essex Police is probably the only force in the country offering this. It will probably take two years to ensure everybody working for the force is trained. Feedback on the course, to date, has been very positive. Control room staff have training and a structure to allow them to highlight vulnerability at an early stage.

Every police officer has a handbook with a guide on how to deal with different types of vulnerability. Feedback on this has again been very positive. Other police forces have shown an interest in doing something similar. The force is currently active in turning this handbook into an app.

A new Public Protection structure will commence on 19 September which will link child protection with the other areas under the remit of public protection, and will ensure all teams are aligned and talking to each other; thus building an estate that will encourage inter-team working.

Mr Kavanagh stated that officers would have his full support when it comes to making judgements about public protection issues. In the past officers felt their discretion and judgements had been removed and these are now being re-established.

There are daily updates on the number of domestic abuse enquiries outstanding. At the time of the HMIC inspection there were over 400 outstanding DA incidents, this has been reduced to 51 as at 12 August 2016.

There is a dedicated CSE triage team which is closely aligned to the missing children team. This is also aligned to social care teams.

Mr Kavanagh reported that children's homes in London are moving significant numbers of children into Essex without vulnerable persons' plans. The Essex Police Missing Persons Liaison Officers (MPLOs) are doing an invaluable job. When the HMIC revisited in March 2016 they described a sea-change in the response to vulnerability – a change in mindsets; effective processes to safeguard victims of CSE and domestic abuse; improvements in detective capacity; safeguarding arrangements and partnership working greatly enhanced. The report from the revisit was published on 7 July 2016. There is a full child abuse inspection likely to take place in September 2016 as part of the national strategy. Mr Kavanagh expressed his commitment to be outstanding show significant improvement in this inspection.

Question 2: Do Essex Police accept accountability for the concerns raised in the HMIC inspection reports around the training of officers and resources?

Responsibility is accepted; however, it was stated Essex Police cannot work on this alone, and, as such, challenged social care to ensure information sharing is improved. The Chief Constable also challenged the Members of Essex County Council to ensure this is achieved. He also reported that Councillor Dick Madden, Gavin Jones and David Wilde have provided Essex Police with great support as far

as this is concerned. However, he is committed to pushing ECC hard to ensure effective joint working.

Question 3: Do Essex Police attend Child Protection planning meetings? If so how does triangulation work; and does this lead to blurred lines around the responsibilities of the police and social care?

DSI Morris reported on Child Protection planning meetings and stated that case conference attendance has significantly improved. Essex Police attended child protection case conferences 18-months ago, but from January this year attendance has improved to 90%. All meetings are minuted. There is more ongoing interaction between the police and social care with daily meetings on strategies around particular children. Both the police and social care are satisfied that they are fully cognisant of the others responsibilities. New ways of interaction are also being looked at, for example video-conferencing.

Question 4: What systems are in place when it comes to dealing with other agencies? Are there any specific frameworks for inter-agency working? Is there joined-up ICT systems?

Systems are in place for multi-agency working and joined-up IT systems. Partners had a domestic abuse triage team that has now move to a Multi-Agency Referral and Assessment Team (MARAT) and they are now developing a joint IT system.

Question 5: Do Essex Police regularly check the current whereabouts of those on the sex offenders register?

There are 1,200 registered sex offenders in Essex, and the demand on officers is increasing by 30% a year. Additional sex offenders are being uncovered at the rate of one per day. All are risk-assessed against national standards. There are 151 sex offenders in Essex who are considered high risk – there are none considered very-high risk. Those considered to be high risk are visited on a frequent basis. It is also mandatory they notify the police where they are. Essex Police are one of only three forces in the country that utilise polygraphs to manage risk – this is used on a voluntary basis but many on the offenders' list agree to use it. There is also a voluntary tag scheme used. There is no perfect system to monitor the 1,200 people for 24 hours a day, but Essex Police is confident they are doing the best they possibly can for the people of Essex.

Additional Questions from Members of the Committee:

Councillor Bobbin: How do the police get involved with the Youth Offending Team?

Mr Kavanagh responded previous strategies led to the unnecessary criminalisation of young people. Now the restorative justice system and cautioning are being promoted – with the exception of zero-tolerance of knives. In the past custody staff have misunderstood alternatives to incarceration in the cells. There is now a much

better understanding of when to call social care. There is also a network of foster carers who will take on these children, if necessary.

Councillor Higgins: In parishes how are safeguarding officers managed?

Community safety hubs are the places where local officers place a telephone call into can provide safeguarding advice. There is one hub for each of the districts of greater Essex. Officers cover a multitude of issues, including training on the signs to look for in relation to safeguarding and children at risk of exploitation.

Councillor Wood: How is £50m going to be saved but the people of Essex still be protected?

Efficiencies are being delivered in back-office functions and Essex Police has one of the lowest costs in terms of back-office in the country. The Chief Constable stated unless he can get a 3.4% uplift in the precept Essex Police will become merely a responsive service. The lack of investment means the visibility of police officers is low. Difficult decisions will have to be made which he will take responsibility for. The Chief Constable will make the strongest possible case to the Police and Crime Commissioner (PCC) for an uplift in the precept. The police force in Essex is the leanest the Chief Constable has ever seen.

Councillor Gibbs: What is the Essex Police response to incidents of grooming?

There has been an increase in the reporting of grooming incidents. CSE goes up to the age of 18, but the police do concentrate on the lower age groups who might be the victims of grooming. The internet has industrialised online imagery and grooming, and Essex Police has one of the largest online investigation teams in the country.

Councillor Whitehouse: The original report drew a contrast with regard to inter-agency working. Will community hubs replicating what went well in Thurrock be rolled-out across the county?

The model used in Thurrock (MASH) is the one Essex Police would strive for throughout the county. Mr Kavanagh suggested the Committee request an item at a future meeting on the MASH Thurrock model. He stated to take the step towards this model would require extra resourcing but he does have a sense that there is more of an appetite at ECC to invest in partnership working.

Councillor Honeywood: With regard to the exchange of information is there a fear of the Data Protection Act (DPA); and what can be done to break down the barriers if there is such a concern?

It was reported that David Wilde has been running workshops on the DPA and information sharing protocols.

Councillor Chandler: How confident, as a Chief Constable, are you that the mindset of officers means it is less likely that domestic abuse murder cases will happen in the future?

With regard to previous cases Mr Kavanagh stated that lessons have been picked up on the awareness of domestic abuse cases; with the HMIC report expressing the sea-change in response to such issues. The systems and awareness of vulnerability are a world away from where they were eight years ago.

NB: These notes have been shared and agreed with Essex Police.