

Central Bedfordshire Council

Executive

5 February 2019

Community Safety Resources

Report of: Cllr Ian Dalgarno, Executive Member Community Services, ian.dalgarno@centralbedfordshire.gov.uk

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This report relates to a decision that is Key

Purpose of this report

1. Both the Council's Residents Survey and the Community Safety Partnership (CSP) Community Safety Survey show that residents in Central Bedfordshire feel less safe than they did in 2016. The purpose of the report is to seek agreement for additional frontline community safety resources to enable the Council to respond proactively to our resident's community safety concerns.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The Executive is asked to:

1. **agree the proposal for additional community safety resources set out in the report.**

Overview and Scrutiny Comments/Recommendations

2. The report was considered at the Sustainable Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 24 January 2019 and their comments will be attached at Appendix A.

Survey results

3. The 2018 Residents Survey shows the percentage of residents feeling safe after dark in Central Bedfordshire has decreased by 9% since 2016. Residents feeling safe during the day has seen a 3% decrease since 2016.

4. Crime and ASB is important in making somewhere a good place to live and the Councils survey identified this as the second issue in most need of improvement, the first being Highways. Several specific crime and ASB issues were considered worse than in 2016 including burglary, car crime, people using/dealing drugs and groups hanging around streets.
5. The CSP survey had 673 respondents from May to October 2018. 71% of those who responded thought crime had changed over the last 12 months. The survey also asked people about the extent to which CSP partners were making people feel safer:

Central Bedfordshire Council:	36% not much: 31% not at all
Bedfordshire Police:	36% not much, 23% not at all
Fire & Rescue Service:	14% not much, 4% not at all

6. Residents comments made in the CSP survey included:
 - *'There seems to be no interest in tackling local issues'*
 - *'Town centre is a no-go area due to gangs and youths carrying knives'*
 - *'I do not feel safe walking anywhere day or night time'*
 - *'Young people openly smoking drugs in the park and public areas'*
 - *'There is a big drug taking culture in the village'*

What's changed?

7. Factors impacting on residents' views include:
 - **Changing priorities** – From a community safety perspective, historically the crime types that caused most concern were burglary, car crime etc. These issues were priorities for the police and councils and were reflected in strategic plans. Over time the focus has changed and whilst these issues remain a key concern for residents, organisational priorities have had to change to respond to different priorities including vulnerability and exploitation, modern slavery, gangs, cuckooing, serious youth violence.
 - **Changing Demand** – changing priorities places different demands on statutory agencies whilst at the same time residents continue to expect they will get a response to the 'usual' issues. Legislation changes have also placed additional demands on statutory agencies and difficult decisions have been made about where and how resources will be deployed, leading to some services stopping or being significantly reduced. The impact on the police has been widely reported in national media setting out concerns that many police forces are at 'tipping point' over budget cuts. Central Bedfordshire will see significant growth in coming years which will continue to add to the existing pressures.

- **Police Crime Commissioners (PCC)** – one of the key impacts of introducing PCCs was that funding for local Community Safety Partnerships (CSPs) was transferred to PCCs. Some PCCs across the country continued to work closely with CSPs to deliver work and provide funding to do so. In other areas bidding processes have been used or work is directly commissioned by PCCs. PCCs also cover many CSP areas and it is not always the case that priorities across local areas are aligned as priorities and localities will need to consider how best they can address local issues within available resources.
- **Neighbourhood Policing Model** – Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services (HMICFRS) raised concerns in 2016 that local policing had been eroded and many forces had failed to 'redefine' neighbourhood policing in the context of reduced budgets and changing demand. New guidelines have been developed to address that concern. They do not cover force structures and resources, they do provide an evidence base to assist forces in designing and implemented a modern policing service. The defining features of neighbourhood policing are:
 - Police officers, staff and volunteers being accessible to, responsible for and accountable to communities
 - Community engagement that builds trust and develops a sophisticated understanding of community needs
 - Collaborative problem-solving with communities supported by integrated working with private, public and voluntary sectors.
- **Austerity** – the need to deliver savings has impacted on public sector organisations leading reductions in the available resources and organisations either 'stepping in' to try and fill some of the gaps left by the reductions across public sector organisations, or 'stepping back' and focusing only on delivering their immediate priorities.

What we think is happening

8. Both surveys indicate that residents feel less safe than they have done previously and some of our residents may well feel that the Council does not contribute to making people feel safe in our area.
9. The Council is actively supporting the community safety agenda in Central Bedfordshire through the work we do:
 - Managing public space CCTV
 - Managing multi agency risk assessment meetings for ASB
 - Managing local problem-solving groups
 - Investigation and enforcement – ASB, Environmental crime, Unauthorised encampments
 - Collating and providing intelligence
 - Delivering the community safety priorities for Central Bedfordshire
 - Collaborative working on safeguarding (children and adults) issues

But our residents want to see a visible and tangible response to the issues that affect them, and their quality of life, on a day to day basis.

10. Crime types in Central Bedfordshire have begun to change with more resource needed to tackle violent and knife related crime, drug use/drug dealing, gangs and exploitation. To manage this the police have had to prioritise its available resource, and the erosion of 'visible' neighbourhood policing has impacted on perception in local communities.
11. The Council has also seen its available community safety resources reduce, but unlike many areas the Council has continued its commitment to providing a front-line resource and community safety has continued to be a priority. But the current resource is stretched and there is very little opportunity for visible, proactive work in, and across, our communities to tackle the crime and ASB issues of most concern to residents and communities.

Responding to our residents

12. To respond proactively to the concerns residents have expressed via the surveys, and to respond to the changing issues that Central Bedfordshire faces, the Council needs to provide a visible officer presence in communities. Officers working in, and with, communities responding to day-to-day issues, can have a significant impact on how safe those communities feel.
13. Some of the new resource will work as a dedicated team of uniformed Neighbourhood Officers regularly patrolling in communities using Council powers and, subject to accreditation, delegated police powers to tackle lower level ASB, littering, environmental crime etc. using sanctions, including Fixed Penalty Notices, available to them. They will engage with residents, businesses and develop a real understanding and knowledge of what is happening in communities and by sharing that knowledge and information they will help to support the police and other agencies in their work. They won't have 'case loads' and they will not be 'office bound'. As far as possible they will provide a presence across Central Bedfordshire although there will be times when they will be deployed in targeted areas based on intelligence and information.
14. The Council also needs to complement this visible presence with officers who can work in and with communities to actively look at tackling the reasons why areas may be experiencing issues. New Community Involvement and Community Safety Officers will work with residents, community organisations and groups, businesses, Town and Parish Councils and Ward members. They will support communities to develop a proactive response to their local community safety issues which may include setting up local community safety groups, promoting volunteering for existing groups e.g. Watch schemes, arranging community events or training, developing local community safety plans, facilitating multi agency diversion schemes.

15. These new resources will ensure that the Council balances four key community safety principles:
 - i. **Communities:** Developing a two-way exchange between residents, the council and its partners by working together to build local intelligence and community safety resilience.
 - ii. **Intelligence:** Proactively work with partners and the community to raise awareness of the importance of submitting intelligence. Neighbourhood, Community Involvement and Community Safety Officers will use their increased community presence to encourage residents to submit their community safety concerns, helping residents to feel involved in resolving issues that affect them directly.
 - iii. **Partnership:** Work with our key partners to gain a clearer strategic understanding and oversight of community safety issues that several agencies are working on so that we can provide a more effective and joined-up response to issues causing the highest need and greatest demand e.g. Substance misuse, serious violent crime
 - iv. **Enforcement:** Enhance existing enforcement work by providing additional visible presence across our communities.

16. The Council has a range of enforcement powers that it can use however we recognise that the wider our powers are the more the new resources can tackle so the Council will make an application to the Chief Constable of Bedfordshire Police to become accredited under the Community Safety Accreditation Scheme (CSAS):
 - The Community Safety Accreditation Scheme (CSAS) is a voluntary scheme under which chief constables can choose to accredit employed people already working in community safety roles with limited but targeted powers. The scheme creates a framework for public and private bodies to work in partnership with the police, providing additional uniformed presence in communities and capitalising on the skills and information captured by those already engaged with the community.

Outcomes

17. Responding to the concerns our residents have reflected in both the Residents Survey and the CSP survey is a priority for the Council.

18. Increasing the Council's community safety resources will facilitate a range of outcomes that will enable us to deliver a range of outcomes including:
 - Increased visible presence in the community
 - Improved public confidence in the Council and its partners
 - Residents and communities influencing the Council's community safety work and vice versa
 - Opportunities to help communities build resilience
 - Improved understanding of our communities and their needs
 - Improved flow of community intelligence
 - Opportunity to expand and build community safety schemes

- Opportunity to develop and support community events
- Earlier intervention and prevention
- Increase community volunteering e.g. Watch schemes
- Complements Neighbourhood Policing models

Considerations and recommendation

19. Community safety has always been a priority for the Council and continues to be so. The work we do does make a difference because we work with residents who have been victims of ASB and crime. We also work to facilitate and support other agencies to act to support victims of crime and this work must continue. However we understand that this work is not visible to most of our residents who want to see a visible and tangible response to their community safety issues.
20. While the police are the primary crime and disorder agency the Council is a key partner in supporting the reduction of crime and disorder in Central Bedfordshire and has a statutory duty to do so. Providing additional council community safety resources may perhaps be seen by some as 'doing what the police should do but that is not the case. The Council has had officers investigating and enforcing criminality for a very long time, working in a complementary and collaborative way with the police, and the proposed additional resources are an extension of what we have been doing for many years.
21. The 2018 Resident survey results show that our residents feel less safe than they did two years ago. This reduction is also evidenced in the CSP survey. Whilst it is well known that there is a gap between perceived fear of crime and actual crime the residents survey results show a statistically significant reduction in people feeling safe. To address our resident's concerns, we need to work differently to make our residents feel safer and tackle the issues they are concerned about. The provision of additional community safety resources will enable the Council to begin to tackle those concerns. As such it is recommended that:
 - The Council agrees the proposal for additional community safety resources set out in the report.

Council Priorities

22. Developing the Councils community safety response supports the following priorities:
 - a. Enhancing Central Bedfordshire – the approach set out in the report will enable the Council to deliver a proactive approach to addressing a range of community safety issues that are of concern to our communities and it will also support improved community cohesion and collaboration.
 - b. Protecting the Vulnerable; Improving Wellbeing – community safety work covers a wide range of issues, some of which impact on the most vulnerable people in our communities. The approach set out will help the Council to identify vulnerability earlier and intervene.

- c. Creating Stronger Communities – the approach set out will work in and with local communities which in turn develops a collaborative working approach. This supports communities to tackle issues in their local areas and helps to improve community cohesion, volunteering and participation.

Corporate Implications

Legal Implications

23. There are no direct legal implications arising from this report. The Council has various duties with regard to crime and disorder under the Crime and Disorder Act 1998 ('the Act'), Police and Justice Act 2006 and Policing & Social Responsibility Act 2011. Under section 17 of the Act, the Council has a statutory duty to do all that it reasonably can to reduce: (i) crime and disorder in its area; (ii) the misuse of drugs, alcohol and other substances in its area; and (iii) re-offending in its area.

Financial and Risk Implications

24. The cost of the proposed approach is estimated at £500k per annum. This includes:
 - a. 12 new community safety posts
 - b. Additional responsibility costs for existing posts e.g. extra role/managerial duties etc.
 - c. Operational budget for the new approach.

This additional funding would be managed through the MTFP process from 2019/20.

25. There would be some capital costs as the additional resources will need vehicles and it is anticipated that the costs for these would be procured from corporate capital funding for fleet vehicles. It is estimated that the capital costs for the purchase of three additional vehicles is in the region of £45k.
26. 2018 Resident survey results show that our residents feel less safe than they did two years ago. Whilst it is well known that there is a gap between perceived fear of crime and actual crime the survey results show a statistically significant reduction in people feeling safe. The reason for this is complex and it is not the case that this is purely a 'council' issue, but the Council does have a statutory duty to do all that it can to reduce crime and disorder in its area. Not responding effectively to community safety issues in our communities poses a risk to the Councils reputation and its duty to tackle crime and disorder.
27. The impact of crime and disorder on victims and communities in terms of financial loss, health and well-being and quality of life is well documented. The Council bears a proportion of these costs because many of our services directly engage with those people who are victims of crime, those who may be exploited through crime and those who are most vulnerable to crime. The impact on the life chances for young people involved in gangs, exploitation, drugs and disorder is also well documented.

28. Investing additional resource into tackling these issues provides the Council with an opportunity to not only improve the quality of life for residents, businesses and communities but also to reduce the financial costs of crime and disorder to the community, the Council and its partners.

Equalities Implications

29. Central Bedfordshire Council has a statutory duty to promote equality of opportunity, eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation and foster good relations in respect of nine protected characteristics; age disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex and sexual orientation.
30. Community safety work is wide ranging covering a multitude of issues. Many issues are often linked to protected characteristics – Hate Crime, Domestic Abuse, exploitation. The proposal set out will facilitate an improved response to identifying and tackling community safety issues where inequality is a factor.

Conclusion and next Steps

31. The report sets out how additional front line community safety resources, set within the context of an approach including partnership, community, intelligence and prevention work streams, enables the Council to deliver outcomes that will make a tangible difference to community safety in communities and addresses the community safety concerns residents have raised in surveys.
32. Subject to approval the next steps are:
- a. Develop job profiles for evaluation and begin recruitment process
 - b. Initiate the Community Safety Accreditation work with Bedfordshire Police

Appendices

Appendix A – Overview and Scrutiny Comments

Background Papers

None

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