

## COMMUNITY SAFETY PARTNERSHIP WORKING PARTY

Minutes of the meeting held on 3 October 2016 at 7.00 pm in the Council Chamber,  
Council Offices, Cecil Street, Margate, Kent.

**Present:** Councillor Curran (Chairman); Councillors Falcon, Hayton, Johnston, Martin and M Saunders

**In Attendance:** Councillors: L Fairbrass and D Saunders

### 1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were received from Councillor Campbell, substituted by Councillor Johnston.

### 2. DECLARATION OF INTERESTS

There were no declarations of interest made at the meeting.

### 3. MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

Councillor Falcon proposed, Councillor M. Saunders seconded and Members agreed the minutes as a correct record of the meeting that was held on 30 June 2016.

### 4. SEXUAL OFFENCES VICTIMS SUPPORT IN THANET

After explaining the brief background to the identified topic for discussion, Councillor Curran, Chairman of the working party invited Acting Detective Chief Inspector Max Davidson, Kent Police to make the presentation. The reason for the invitation was for Members to seek clarification on the facts regarding the discrepancies between reported rape crimes and conviction rates in Thanet. Acting DCI Davidson gave some contextual background to the presentation.

**Pre 2013:** Before the referral Clinical approach was adopted, each of the three police divisions in Kent had a rape investigation unit. There were approximately eight rape case suites in various districts. Part of the investigation process was to take victims away from the police station to these suites in order to carry out medical examinations and interview by video. These have now been replaced by a new approach that introduced Sexual Assault Referral Clinics (SARC).

**New Approach since the 2013 Report:** These clinics capture forensic evidence (a task that was previous done through these suites). After the national review that led to the Home Office report in 2013, a decision was made to standardise at high specifications, the collection and processing of evidence relating to sexual offences in England and Wales through SARC. This was now being done with the support of the NHS, as the main commissioning group. Thirty nine clinics were set up across England and Wales, to manage a high standard of interviewing process and evidence gathering.

Kent has one such clinic in Maidstone and it is called Beach House. The process for collecting forensic samples and conducting medical examination was now being done by specialised staff in Kent; Mountain Health Care is the company that is contracted to deliver this service. The unit is part of Maidstone Hospital and has a nurse led forensics team.

Mountain Health Care is familiar with the Police requirements for evidence collection and works to those standards. They are able to write up forensic strategies to the required police specifications within the agreed timescales.

There are other victim support services in the county. These include the East Kent Rape Line, an independent service that provides support to victims of sexual violence and is based in Canterbury. There is Family Matters in Gravesend, as the counterpart to EK Rape Line.

The referral clinics provide twenty four hour service for actual victim support and strategy discussions. Rape Crisis, a national charity to which the EK Rape Line is an affiliate member. Victims living in Thanet can be referred to the EK Rape Line in Canterbury or they have the option to report to the Police or Accident & (A&E) at QEQM Hospital. Victims can also report to their GPs who are familiar with the SARC, and can refer them to the appropriate services for further support.

Max Davidson referred to the 114 cases highlighted in the Freedom of Information request were sexual offence cases that were reported in Thanet in 2015. Of these cases, three had resulted in convictions at the time. He advised Members on the process for handling rape case as follows:

- A rape investigation can take approximately 9 months;
- Crime Prosecution Services (CPS) make the final decision on cases submitted to them whether to prosecute or not;
- Due to the complexities around such cases, CPS has an approximate 3 months turnaround before making a decision regarding prosecution;
- The judicial process can take up to 9 months; This means that a proportion of the 2015 cases (114) are still to be confirmed as going ahead for prosecution or not;
- In 2015, 10 cases were charged;
- Conviction rate in Kent was approximately 53% (rolling year data August 2016).

Acting DCI Davidson said that in November 2014, Kent Police set up a centralised Sexual Offences Investigation Team which is in the Public Protection Unit and they specialise in serious sexual offence investigations.

The unit is split into two with one half focusing on the north and western of the county whilst the other is responsible for the eastern side. The officers are supervised by Detective Sergeants and detective Inspectors assigned to serve on these two areas. He then gave some approximate data around the number of sexual offences (including rape cases) reported in Kent advising that the number had increased over the past five years.

In response to a Member question, Max Davidson reported that:

- Although he did not have the exact figures of male rape victims, 10-15% were male and 80-85% were female victims;
- Within those figures were child rape victims as well;
- The SARC process works on strategies that recognise:
  - Transgender victims;
  - Female victims (of Female Genital Mutilation);
  - Child victims (Child Sexual Exploitation – CSE);
  - Male victims;
  - Victims from different cultures.
- The increase in the number of reported rape cases was in part due to the work done to encourage victims to come forward;
- Operation Yewtree (especially around the Savile Inquiry) has encouraged historical offences victims to come forward as well;
- The Home Office approach where the Police would ask a question on sexual offending when they are processing other reported crimes (specifically within domestic violence);
- Marital rape was also investigated;

- Mental health services staff were very well trained to support rape victims (i.e. alcohol/drug intake is considered and questions are asked in order to offer the best possible support to the victims).

Members observed that victim support was a very important part of the process of investigating and prosecuting sexual offences. They also said that the public should be made aware of the importance of keeping safe and being aware of their environment.

Members acknowledged that there was an improvement in approach by the Police since 2013. They further asked the following:

- How many of the reported rape cases were withdrawn before they went up to CPS? In response Max Davidson said that although he did not have the exact figures, across the board, approximately 35-40% of sexual assault victims did not want to proceed further with their cases.
- How many cases did CPS decline to prosecute? Acting DCI Davidson said that the unit he worked for was a victim-focused organisation that made decisions for the good of the victims and public. He was currently seconded to the Crown Prosecution Service and they were working on quality in decision making.
- Max Davidson said that although he did not have the statistics for the cases that the CPS declined to prosecute, all were subject of careful consideration by experienced and dedicated lawyers. It could take between four to six hours for the lawyers to make such a decision after consulting with the Police before deciding not to prosecute.

There are currently 400 highly trained police officers, who have received additional training (called Initial Response Officers) who attend sexual assault investigations in Kent. In response to another member question, Max Davidson advised that there was a team in Kent that manages violent offenders and the team provides information to the investigation each time a case was reported. This would help rule in or out any of the ex-offenders they manage.

Chief Inspector Sharon Adley added that all police officers are trained to respond effectively to reports of rape and sexual offences; they also have the ability to contact their supervisor from the scene if they wish to seek guidance.

One Member requested for information regarding reported sexual offence cases reported in Thanet in 2015. Members requested for that information as it would provide a clear picture of the challenges in the district regarding that problem. Members also requested for contact details for all the sexual offence victim support organisations in the district or neighbouring areas.

Members asked if there was any protection against child sexual exploitation in the district. Max Davidson informed the meeting that Kent Police were currently conducting Operation Willow which provides awareness to the local communities about sexual exploitation of children. This was a top of the list priority for the government and Kent Police. Whilst the victims are young boys, the higher percentage of this exploitation was towards the young girls. This issue was closely linked to missing children and the police and partner agencies are working on this problem.

CI Adley said that her staff are highly trained in this area, as are partners in identifying signs of CSE. For example taxi drivers are undergoing training by Thanet District Council, before being issued with operating licences.

There was also some ongoing work in schools to raise the awareness amongst school children. CI Adley and Members accepted that a multi-agency presentation on

'awareness about child sex exploitation in Thanet' be made at the next meeting of the working party.

The Chairman thanked Acting DCI Davidson and CI Adley for the presentation.

Members requested for more signposting information which they can share with communities in their respective wards. Penny Button summed up requests from the working party as follows:

- Need for signposting information about sexual offences victims support that Members can share with residents;
- More information about SARC open day and share with Members;
- Community Safety Unit (CSU) to provide figures about sexual violence offences reported in Thanet in 2015;
- Circulate information on EK Rape Line;
- Campaign about signposting;
- Invite Victim Support, Rape Crisis to make a presentation at the next meeting of the working party.

Councillor Johnston proposed and Councillor Falcon seconded the following recommendations that:

1. Members note with gratitude the presentation and the clarification on several points;
2. The Overview & Scrutiny Panel request the Chairman of Council invites Kent Police and other relevant bodies to give a presentation to Full Council so that all councillors are fully informed of the very valuable work that the Police, Rape Crisis and others do.

When put to vote the motion was lost.

Officers suggested that the topic could be forwarded to the Corporate Management Team for consideration as a possible Members Briefing topic. However one Member felt that these were not very well attended by councillors.

Councillor Martin proposed, Councillor M. Saunders seconded and upon a casting vote by the Chairman, Members agreed that an invitation be made for a follow-up multi-agency presentation before the working party can come up with recommendations on the way forward.

Meeting concluded: 8.25 pm