

POLICY & RESOURCES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

7 JULY 2022

QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC

(1) QUESTION FROM DAVID WEBB TO THE LEADER/CABINET MEMBER FOR CORPORATE MATTERS & PERFORMANCE DELIVERY

In the statement of standards booklet on Southend Borough Council it pledges to respond to letters within 10 working days and 5 working days to emails. Is this being adhered to and how many letters and emails have been answered in May and June 2022?

Thank you for your question, Mr Webb. As a Council we respond to e-mail within five working days and these go through a process where they are sent to the relevant department to respond.

Between May and June 2022, the Council received over 4000 emails. However, the number of letters received are not currently recorded in the same way.

The Council does monitor response times for some specific communications, for example, complaints and Freedom of Information requests. That said, the Council is very receptive to ideas that will improve its service and as a result of your question, I have asked officers to re-examine our current practices.

(2) QUESTION FROM DAVID WEBB TO THE CABINET MEMBER FOR PUBLIC PROTECTION

In the council Tax letter, there was a pamphlet from the Police and Fire Commissioner, Roger Hirst. It highlighted 184 more Police officers, growth of 703 officers since May 2016, biggest investment in Essex Police in a decade. Total 3,553 officers. 184 increase: 44 more tackling serious violence, 36 more tackling Domestic abuse, 37 more tackling serious organised crimes, 35 more officers to deal with crime in local districts, 32 more officers road policing and dog handlers.

Does the portfolio holder think the increase of 184 police officers to 3,553 will be able to fight the crime in Essex and Southend and answer and deal with 2,000 police calls a day in Southend?

Response prepared by Chief Inspector Ian Hughes

Thank you for your question, Mr Webb. Personally, I think there will never be enough Police officers on our streets but that is my view, I am a zero tolerance person. I strongly believe that the hallmark of a civilised society is community safety.

Do I think the current recruitment and increases are enough? The current recruitment phase takes us back roughly to Officer numbers in 2010 before the swingeing cuts made by the then Home Secretary. At that time, before the cuts, it was felt even then there were not enough. Policing has changed dramatically with ever increasing demands such as online crime, hate crime, domestic violence and mental health all adding severe pressure. My position in 2010 was in strong opposition to the 2010 cuts and I even put myself forward to be elected as PCC in 2016 to make the case for Essex.

I and SCC work closely with Essex Police and the PFCC and where possible we are making good progress. Southend City within Essex has real challenges as a place receiving up to 7m visitors PA. Through my constant lobbying work with the PFCC, senior Police Officers, stakeholders, Essex Police, in partnership with SCC and others are now treating our tourist season as an event management plan, it is called Operation Union. This sees significantly increased numbers of officers of up to 30 on busy days planned throughout the peak season with additional resources also on tap. I am very happy that at last we are proactively policing our peak demands rather than reactively. We have received many compliments from people noticing the Police presence both from businesses and the public.

In addition, Essex Police have deployed an additional new dedicated town centre team formed from 7 PC'S and a sergeant making a total of 8 for the town centre. SCC have invested 2.2 m upgrading and expanding our CCTV network and SCC are recruiting more CSO's Further Essex Police are constantly attempting to recruit more Special Constable's.

We are in a better position now than previously and I am very happy that the PFCC and Chief Constable now better understand and recognise our unique challenge. The PFCC is doing a good job as far as I am concerned. Essex Police/ Southend Police also do a fantastic job with the resources they have and I hope the upward trend in Officer numbers continues. It must be added that deployment of Police resources is an operational Police matter so my and SCC's role in this is make the case for Southend City as loudly as possible, which we are doing with some success.

(3) QUESTION FROM JUDITH MCMAHON TO THE CABINET MEMBER FOR ASSET MANAGEMENT AND INWARD INVESTMENT

In Agenda Item 6, please could you clarify for me whether the details 3.4 are or were applicable to the £10 million of council tax monies given to the business called Turnstone and the administrative tasks associated with these monies gifted to this business?

Thank you for your question, Mrs McMahon. The Council has not and will not be gifting £10m Council Tax monies to Turnstone. Turnstone will be entitled to a fair return for its agreed role as facilitator and development manager from the project funders. The £10m investment by the Council will be paid to the fund as a lease premium to reduce the level of private finance required and therefore the annuity rent paid by the Council. This in turn provides an improved return to the Council from Day 1 of the annuity lease.