

Redditch Crime and Disorder Scrutiny Panel: Chair's report of Panel meeting held on Tuesday 7th September 2010.

The meeting was held to discuss topics raised by Members during previous meetings. There were two guest speakers: Inspector Ian Joseph, West Mercia Police Force, who was invited to talk about the £10 million cuts to the West Mercia Force's budget over the next three years, and Acting Detective Inspector (ADI) Vikki Reay from West Mercia Police Authority, who spoke on Sexual Assault Referral Centres (SARC).

Other items on the agenda were:

- a) Questions for the PCT, about a SARC for North Worcestershire.
- b) The Panel's response to the White Paper: Policing in the 21st century.
- c) The Panel's response to a consultation paper from the Home Office on the future of Community Safety Partnerships.

The co-opted representative from the West Mercia Police authority, Councillor Blagg, sent apologies to the meeting with ADI V Reay attending as substitute. Given it was Councillor Blagg's suggestion to have the two items on the agenda I invited Councillor Blagg to submit written comments to the meeting on the items for discussion. Copies of Cllr Blagg's comments were circulated prior to the meeting.

The panel were also joined by Michael Collins (a local magistrate and Redditch Standards Committee member) and Bev Houghton, Redditch Community Safety Manager.

Item 5: Sexual Assault Referral Unit (SARC).

The Panel received a very informative presentation on SARCs by ADI Reay. The presentation was followed by a question and answer session.

Following that the panel learnt:

- a) That West Mercia was one of only four of the 43 police force areas that did not have SARCs. (The South Wales area has 5 SARCs).
- b) That an independent business case has been commissioned by West Mercia on the need for a SARC which points to the north Worcestershire area being an area of need. Copies of the report were circulated to members of the panel.
- c) The 10 minimum elements required for a SARC.
- d) In West Mercia during 2008-2009 there were 262 reports of rape of which 40% (105) were in Worcestershire. 13% (34) of those cases in Worcestershire were in Redditch. In 2009-2010 the figures were 250 in West Mercia of which 45.2% (113) were from Worcestershire and of those 14.8% (37) were from Redditch.
- e) A recent survey has indicated that only 11% of all rapes are reported to the Police.
- f) The Government has said they want a SARC in every Police area.

- g) A SARC board has been set up and is due to meet for the first time in October.
- h) Funding can be sourced and obtained by various means, public, private and from the third sector.

The Panel thanked ADI Reay for her attendance and her undoubted enthusiasm for the need for a SARC for the West Mercia area.

Item 6: Questions to PCT.

The Panel discussed which questions to raise with the PCT at our forthcoming meeting on the subject of SARC. At the PCT's request we have sent them the written questions in advance and outlined the areas for discussion.

Item 7: Policing White Paper. Policing in the 21st Century.

The Panel discussed and replied to the majority of questions posed in the white paper. Reference was made to Councillor Blagg's written submission (most of which the Panel were in agreement with).

The Panel's comments remained within appropriate scrutiny remit (i.e. as to how the proposals would affect community safety and the Community Safety Partnership in Redditch). As a result of this we did not comment upon chapter 3 of the paper as this was considered more relevant to the Police than to wider community safety issues. The responses were that of the Panel and not that of the Council.

Broadly speaking the Panel were not in agreement for the proposal of a Commissioner, as outlined in the white paper, for the following reasons:

- a) This arrangement would not increase efficiencies or governance, (in fact the Panel felt it would reduce both).
- b) This arrangement would not reduce costs.
- c) The election of a single commissioner for West Mercia could not effectively work due to the sheer geographical area, encompassing a number of parishes, districts, boroughs, unitary and county councils in the three counties and covering a population of around 1.2 million.
- d) A single commissioner might politicise the process, given that all the authority and decision making powers would be vested in one person.
- e) The paper was unclear about both Assistant Commissioners - if these assistants would be allowed and how many - and crime panels, in terms of how many there would be and how they would be set up and serviced.

In response to specific questions in specific areas the Panel did make constructive comments on how efficiencies and improvements could be made in such areas as: procurement; IT services; joint working; volunteers; common systems; shared services; breaking down barriers; and more partnership working.

During this section Inspector Ian Joseph outlined the £10 million savings which were being made by West Mercia Police through restructuring in advance of the expected spending review to be announced in October by the government. (This was in an exercise called Planning for the Future). Members were advised about how these actions as would effect Redditch and that that would be a strategy to protect the “front line services”. Various tiers of management and “back office posts” were not being or had already not been replaced when they became vacant. Furthermore, where specialist officers, in for example licensing and crime risk management, previously would cover one single district each they were increasingly covering all three districts in the division. This strategy, the panel suggested, had both advantages and disadvantages. The Panel were also advised that other strategies were under examination in the areas of recruitment and retirement. The Panel thanked Ian for the briefing.

Item 8: Response to consultation paper on community safety partnership.

This was an extremely tight consultation period. The response in fact had to be sent to the Government Office of the West Midlands on the day following the Panel’s meeting.

Again the response provided was that of the Panel and not of the Council.

The paper sought views on repealing various regulations which Community Safety Partnerships have to adhere to. The panel questioned and took advice from both relevant Officers and the police before replying to the questions. The panel acknowledged that the Redditch Committee Safety Partnership worked well and was effective. The Panel responded, and suggested that the government should not repeal many of the current regulations as the disadvantages outweighed the advantages in doing so.

Councillor W. Hartnett. 8th September 2010.
Chair Redditch Crime and Disorder Scrutiny Panel.