

Crime and Disorder Scrutiny Panel

Tuesday, 19 July 2011

MINUTES

Present:

Councillor Bill Hartnett (Chair), and Councillors Andrew Brazier (substituting for Councillor Roger Hill), Anita Clayton and Alan Mason (substituting for Councillor Rebecca Blake).

Also Present:

Councillor S Blagg, (Co-opted member from the West Mercia Police Authority)
Michael Collins, (Independent Vice-Chair of the Standards Committee)
Inspector Ian Joseph (West Mercia Police)
Councillor Brenda Quinney

Officers:

B Houghton

Committee Services Officer:

J Bayley and M Craggs

1. APOLOGIES AND NAMED SUBSTITUTES

Apologies for absence were received on behalf of Councillors Blake, Hill and W King.

Apologies were also received from Mr Ken Hazledene, (Redditch Anti-Harassment Partnership) and Mr Philip Griffiths, (Hereford and Worcester Fire and Rescue Service).

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST AND PARTY WHIP

There were no declarations of interest nor of any party whip.

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Chair

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3. MINUTES

Members discussed the minutes of the previous meeting of the Panel.

As requested, the Chair of the West Mercia Police Authority, Councillor Sheila Blagg, had been informed of the Panel's view that a needs based approach to allocating community safety funding should be adopted in future years by the elected Police Commissioner for the area. Members were advised that these considerations were likely to inform the Police Commissioner's decisions with regards to funding allocations. However, whilst funds had previously been distributed by the Safer Communities Board across Worcestershire, the Police Commissioner would make decisions about the allocation of funding across the wider West Mercia Police Force area, which also encompassed Herefordshire and Shropshire.

Performance in relation to NI 15, serious violent crime, had also been discussed at the previous meeting. Members were advised that whilst the performance statistics might appear concerning the increase followed changes to rules at the national level with regards to the assessment of serious violent crime. A wide range of reported crimes were classified as constituting serious violent crime including offences which resulted in less serious outcomes. Similarly, the rules for assessing the threat of violence related to a range of offences, from bullying at school to more significant threats of serious crimes.

Finally, in relation to minute 37, an update on progress with the introduction of a Sexual Assault Referral Centre (SARC) was provided. The panel was informed that appropriate staff would be employed over the following six months and partner organisations were aiming to open the SARC by April 2012, when the facility would be more widely promoted.

RESOLVED that

subject to noting the updates as detailed above, the minutes of the meeting of the Crime and Disorder Scrutiny Panel held on 14th April 2011 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

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4. COMMUNITY SAFETY IN REDDITCH - PRESENTATION

The Chair welcomed Inspector Ian Joseph, West Mercia Police, to the meeting and thanked him for agreeing to deliver a presentation on the subject of crime and community safety.

The Panel was informed that following the general election in 2010 requirements for performance monitoring had changed. However, there remained a need to understand the main offences impacting on local communities amongst partner organisations, and one of the most effective ways of realising this goal was to compare performance in relation to crime this year to performance in the same period of the previous year.

There were seven key crime types for Redditch recorded during the year. The first of these crime types was violence against the person, covering a range of crimes from common assault to murder. The levels of violent crime had been rising slowly over the previous 18 months, though the rate of reported offences in this category in Redditch had fallen from 506 the previous year to 486 offences. Serious violent crime remained an area of concern and would be reviewed in due course.

Sexual offences were also recorded. The number of reported offences in this category had increased from 32 the previous year to 50. Similarly, robbery rates had increased from 13 to 20 when compared to the previous year though detection rates had improved in this time. In both cases these crime types were divisional priorities and were considered serious offences, though offenders were not always aware of the significant criminal justice penalties for robbery offences.

Burglary of dwellings was another crime type where there had been an increase in the rate of recorded offences, from 55 to 79, when compared to the previous year. This rise corresponded with national trends, though was concerning when compared to a consistent decline in rates in previous years. Much of the increase at the local level had occurred in April, at a time when a number of prolific offenders had been active in the town. The number of these offences reported had decreased significantly following the arrest and imprisonment of four of these offenders. Other forms of burglary, such as burglary from commercial properties, were similarly classified as a specific crime type. The rate of these crimes had remained static as 86 such crimes had been recorded for both years.

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Theft and the handling of stolen goods was a further crime type where there had been an increase in recorded offences. Thefts within local shops, particularly in the Kingfisher Shopping Centre, were among the main locations where these offences occurred. Local partners were working with retailers to encourage security guards to intercept thieves before they left shops. Members noted that by combining resources retailers could collectively employ a security guard at a relatively limited financial cost to each business.

Criminal damage was the final crime type monitored on an ongoing basis. The rates of this type of crime had also increased, from 320 to 379 when compared to the previous year. Rates of criminal damage were often connected to the levels of anti-social behaviour within an area. Fortunately, the divisional figures for anti-social behaviour were positive, indicating a decrease from 6,092 reported incidents the previous year to 4,588.

High profile cases in recent years had challenged public confidence in the police at the national level. To address these concerns the Police were aware of a need to identify and manage risks, particularly through identifying and supporting vulnerable people. As part of this process care plans were being developed for vulnerable people.

The Redditch Community Safety Partnership also had an important role in securing the safety of local residents. As part of this process the partnership had delivered a number of projects that had had a positive impact on the local community. This included Operation StaySafe, whereby a centre was provided as a safe location to which relevant agencies could withdraw young people at risk in the town centre due to intoxication. Nine young people had been helped in this manner in Redditch in late 2010. Partner organisations had also been implementing Operation Straightline, which similarly targeted intoxicated young people. The process was less resource intensive than Operation StaySafe, as it involved a referral process, though had helped to educate young people and parents about the dangers of intoxication.

The partnership had also delivered a bin fire project, which was established in response to a number of dangerous bin fires in residential areas in the Church Hill area in 2010. New bin nodes had been introduced which located the bins away from residential properties. Unfortunately, a fire had subsequently occurred in one of the nodes as a result of arson. Lessons had been learned from this episode and it was anticipated the future initiatives would involve the location of bins away from residential properties in order to protect local residents.

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Neighbourhood Action Days had similarly been organised by partners working together. These Action Days had occurred in parts of the Borough that had been adversely affected by crime or anti-social behaviour in recent years. The Action Days enabled partners to engage with local residents directly and to identify issues of concern.

Reactive actions had also been launched by the partnership's Tasking Group to manage emerging issues. In one case the recent death of Mr Cox in Rednal, in connection with a burglary, had highlighted the vulnerability of elderly people to this type of offence. As a consequence the partnership had reviewed referral processes for vulnerable people and Age UK had been invited to assist partners in identifying actions that could be taken to help elderly people.

The possession and supply of controlled substances, particularly drug abuse, remained a continuing area of interest for local councillors. There was no evidence, however, to suggest that drug abuse was more of a problem in Redditch than in other parts of the county. Drug offences were generally only recorded when they were detected. In recent years there had been two major Police operations in Redditch, Operation Magenta and Operation Wizard, which had involved undercover police officers targeting drug suppliers. Each time an undercover officer had purchased drugs as part of the scheme the purchase had been recorded as an offence, thereby increasing the recorded crime statistics for this crime type.

The ongoing worth of Partners and Communities Together (PACT) was discussed. Whilst attendance at formal PACT meetings had decreased in recent years residents continued to engage with partners through the more innovative PACT processes, such as Environmental Visual Audits and open air surgeries. Concerns were expressed that the number of both residents and councillors attending PACT meetings may have fallen because the meetings were only advertised on the West Mercia Police website. Consequently, Inspector Joseph was asked to consider the approach used to communicate PACT meeting arrangements further.

The police remained satisfied with the work of the partnership and believed that the partnership made a positive contribution to community safety at the local level. However, there were concerns amongst all partners about the long-term financial position of the partnership and the potential implications of reductions in staff and other changes to partner organisations, including the police, on the

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work of the body. To address these concerns some changes to working practices had already occurred, such as an arrangement to hold Tasking Group meetings every six weeks rather than on a monthly basis to accommodate partners' needs. In the long-term the partnership would need to become more 'joined-up' and would need to focus on delivering realistic and achievable projects.

The Panel thanked Inspector Joseph for delivering the presentation.

RESOLVED that

the report be noted.

5. NOTES FROM THE REDDITCH COMMUNITY SAFETY PARTNERSHIP

RESOLVED that

the minutes of the meetings of the Community Safety Partnership Board held on 16th February and 31st March 2011 be noted.

(During consideration of this item Members discussed matters that necessitated the disclosure of exempt information. It was therefore agreed to exclude the press and public prior to any debate on the grounds that information would be revealed relating to any action taken, or to be taken, in connection with the prevention, investigation or prosecution of crime.)

6. WORK PROGRAMME

Members discussed the latest version of the Panel's Work Programme.

The Chair noted that, as requested, training would be delivered on the subject of the Community Safety Partnership's new Performance Management Framework at the following meeting of the Panel. This would be followed by scrutiny of the first quarterly performance management report for the partnership.

Members were also advised about progress with regards to consideration of alcohol related admission rates amongst young people to the Alexandra Hospital. The Chair of the Panel had advised the Overview and Scrutiny Committee about the Panel's consideration of this issue. A number of letters, to the Worcestershire Drug and Alcohol Action Team (DAAT) and to Anne Milton MP, Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Health, had

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been dispatched at the request of the Committee to elicit further information on this subject. Responses had been received from both sources and a decision had been made to refer the material gathered by both the Panel and the Committee to Worcestershire County Council, which was due to scrutinise the issue as part of the Council's crime and disorder scrutiny arrangements. Consequently, Members determined that no further action on this issue was required by the Panel.

RESOLVED that

the Panel's Work Programme be noted.

7. EXCLUSION OF THE PUBLIC AND PRESS

RESOLVED that

under S.100 I of the Local Government Act 1972, as amended by the Local Government (Access to Information) (Variation) Order 2006, the public be excluded from the meeting for the following matter on the grounds that it involves the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in the relevant paragraph 7 of Part 1 of Schedule 12 (A) of the said Act, as amended:

- **Notes from the Redditch Community Safety Partnership (as detailed at minute 5 above).**

The Meeting commenced at 6.30 pm
and closed at 7.40 pm