

At a meeting of the COMMUNITY AND SAFER CITY SCRUTINY COMMITTEE held in the CIVIC CENTRE on TUESDAY, 6th SEPTEMBER, 2011 at 5.30 p.m.

Present:-

Councillor Anderson in the Chair

Councillors Copeland, Curran, Emerson, Essl, Forbes, T. Martin, Thompson, D. Trueman and Wiper

Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were submitted on behalf of Councillor Scaplehorn

Minutes of the Last Meeting held on 19th July, 2011

1. RESOLVED that the minutes of the last meeting of the Committee held on 19th July, 2011 be confirmed and signed as a correct record.

Declarations of Interest (including Whipping Declarations)

Response from Cabinet – 22 June 2011 – Policy Review – Study into Alcohol, Violence and the Night Time Economy

Councillor Essl declared a personal interest as an owner and manager of Hackney Carriage licence plates.

Response from Cabinet – 22 June 2011 – Policy Review – Study into Alcohol, Violence and the Night Time Economy

The deputy Chief Executive and the Portfolio Holder for Safer City submitted a report (copy circulated) which provided feedback from the Cabinet meeting held on 22nd June, 2011 which considered the Scrutiny Committee's policy review report into Alcohol, Violence and the Night Time Economy.

(For copy report – see original minutes)

The Chairman welcomed the Portfolio Holder, Councillor Kelly, to the meeting.

Councillor Kelly advised that the Cabinet had considered the report and had accepted the Committee's recommendations. He then addressed some of the various recommendations and the work that had been done to progress these. The

Council was keen to continue with the use of drink banning orders and the Best Bar None scheme was continuing to encourage premises to work to prevent their customers from getting drunk. The Taxi Marshalls had been removed from Park Lane on Friday nights however the service was continuing at Green Terrace; the savings achieved by removing the Park Lane Taxi Marshalls on Friday nights would be used to provide additional cover when necessary, for example following concerts at the Stadium of Light.

Voluntary reductions in licensing hours had been considered as a way of reducing alcohol related violence; licensees would be encouraged to close their premises earlier. There was work to reduce the number of alcohol related incidents. There was a range of work ongoing to reduce the number of alcohol related incidents and the PCT were looking at ways to reduce the number of alcohol related hospital admissions. A proposal was being looked at around developing an SOS Bus for the city centre to help reduce the pressure on the emergency department on weekend nights. It had been agreed that the alcohol treatment services would be recommissioned.

The Chairman stated that Members had been on a visit to the city centre and had met with the street pastors; they did an excellent job with assisting people who may have had too much to drink. The younger generation would often get drunk at home before going out. Having seen how intoxicated people were on nights out she found it hard to believe that it was an offence to serve anyone who was drunk.

Councillor T. Martin stated that the Taxi Marshalls at Green Terrace were excellent; there had been a noticeable change since they were implemented. The street pastors were also welcomed, there were concerns about broken glass on the streets and the pastors would give out flat soled shoes to people who had taken their high heeled shoes off. He felt that there was no need for premises to be open until 4 or 5 in the morning.

Councillor Kelly stated that the street pastors were given as much support as possible; part of the cause of glass being on the streets was people who took drinks outside when they went out to smoke, these glasses then sometimes got knocked over and broken. The 'Café Culture' which it was hoped would come about as a result of the new licensing laws had not materialised and with the proliferation of cheap alcohol a lot of people were going out with the intention of drinking as much as possible. There was the potential for a late night levy to be introduced which would see late opening bars being required to contribute to the cost of policing and street cleaning.

Councillor T. Martin commented on the change in drinking culture and stated that when drinking pints of beer it was easier to be aware of how much you had drunk than when drinking spirits or alcopops which were popular among younger drinkers.

Councillor Kelly agreed with this and added that young people drank a lot of shots and would have spirits mixed with energy drinks. The low cost of drinks had resulted in a lot of bars closing down as they could not sell enough to cover their operating costs.

Councillor Essl stated that the Taxi Marshalls were excellent and that they prevented a lot of trouble from occurring.

Councillor Forbes queried the late night levy and was informed by Councillor Kelly that the city provided a lot to ensure the safety of late night drinkers and the levy would pass some of these costs onto premises which decided to open until the early hours of the morning. Councillor Forbes then stated that she did not think a change to a 'Café Culture' would happen as people went out with the intention of getting drunk.

Julie Smith, Associate Policy Lead for Community Safety, advised that the Primary Care Trust had invested £2.6 million in alcohol services in the city. The drug and alcohol treatment services had been recommissioned and there was now a focus on getting people recovered and out of treatment rather than just getting people into treatment and keeping them there. She was not aware of any monitoring of people after they had left treatment but would look into this and feedback on the process; it was known however that people would often relapse and it could take several courses of treatment before they were recovered.

The Chairman thanked Councillor Kelly for his attendance and it was:-

2. RESOLVED that the content of the report be noted.

Policy Review – Monitoring of Recommendations

The Chief Executive submitted a report (copy circulated) which provided Members with progress updates in relation to the Fear of Crime policy review and the Anti-Social Behaviour policy review recommendations.

(For copy report – see original minutes)

Julie Smith, Associate Policy Lead for Community Safety, presented the report and advised that the Committee had been receiving 6 monthly progress updates. As shown in the table at paragraph 3.1 to the report, all of the key actions had been achieved and so the focus of the update report was to inform members on what partners had done to add further value to the original actions..

The Action Plan at Appendix A to the report detailed the progress made in relation to each of the actions which had arisen from the policy review recommendations. Dr Smith went through this action plan and drew Members attention to some of the actions listed.

Dr Smith referred to the Fear of Crime review and started by referring to recommendation 4, which was detailed in the action plan, and advised that a task and finish group had been set up in order to look at promoting and publicising how offenders are dealt with. The Police publicised some information on sentencing on the internet, in the local media and at PACT meetings. The government were keen to publicise sentencing information and as such, from May 2012 there would be

information included on the national online crime mapping website www.police.uk showing what had happened following the crimes.

With regard to recommendation 7 Dr Smith stated that that the safer communities survey has shown good awareness, amongst local residents, of the community payback scheme which was a good way to improve the environment, this had the advantage that fear of crime would be reduced. There was still a need to raise awareness of the scheme and feedback postcards showing before and after pictures of the work done had been introduced.

Dr Smith then referred to recommendation 10 and advised that there had been a lot of work around communications. Leaflets, newsletters and emails were residents preferred method of getting information on community safety and so were used to inform residents of the work done. The promotion of the PACT meetings was good in Sunderland with 71 percent of residents being aware of them.

Dr Smith then moved onto the Anti-Social Behaviour policy review and advised that there had been a number of developments and some of the recommendations had been incorporated into the Council's strategic review of ASB services, led by Alan Caddick. She then referred to Recommendation 7 and advised that the XL youth village scheme had expanded greatly and was now citywide and was still undergoing continual development, including the introduction of the youth buses. They allowed youth work to be targeted at anti-social behaviour hotspots.

Councillor Emerson commented that these past policy reviews linked into the current review into Community Cohesion. He also stated that elderly residents often assumed that groups of young people were causing a nuisance. The XL Youth Villages were excellent, when the villages had been held in Ryhope the local police had stated that the area had been very quiet. The villages were good at preventing young people from drinking as they wanted to be allowed into the village but were only allowed in if they had not been drinking; young people who had been turned away because they were drunk had been allowed in the next week when they had arrived without having consumed any alcohol.

Dr Smith responded stating that the youth villages had allowed engagement with young people who the providers had previously not been able to engage with.

Councillor T. Martin agreed with Councillor Emerson's comments and added that the Youth Villages attracted young people from different areas and there were no territorial issues. Andy Neal had done a lot of good work on youth provision and it had been a great loss when he tragically died. It was not always possible to attend the PACT meetings; there were 2 meetings on at the same time as this Committee Meeting. Stories in the local press could increase fear of crime, recently there had been a story in the Echo about a man who had been beaten and robbed by a group of youths near to his home. The police website was good however the maps were not always accurate; he had heard an article on the radio about a man who had found that there were five incidents recorded on what was usually a quiet street, after a submitting a Freedom of Information request it was discovered that the incidents had actually occurred on streets near to the street they were recorded at.

Dr Smith advised that the national police website on crime maps provided a lot of good information on local policing teams and PACT meetings and had a lot of visitors, however, the crime mapping was an issue though; crimes were clustered in the centre of streets rather than being shown where the crime took place and this led to some of the information being misleading.

Councillor Thompson stated that the youth buses were excellent; every Wednesday there was a youth bus in his area where there was no other provision. At the local residents association meeting the local young people had done a presentation for the older residents in an effort to improve relationships between the age groups.

The Chairman commented that fear of crime was a difficult subject. Public transport could be very frightening at night. CCTV cameras were good however they did not protect people from crime, only help to catch the offender after the fact. In Washington there had previously been areas where there was too much greenery, this had been cut back and had made the areas lighter and increased people's feelings of safety.

Dr Smith stated that there was a strong correlation between how well informed people felt about what partners are doing to make their area safer and how safe they felt.

Councillor T. Martin referred to a time when he had been travelling on the Metro and at Brockley Whins it had looked as though there was going to be trouble. He had moved from his seat into the space between the two carriages; if he had not moved he would have been showered with broken glass as bricks were thrown through the windows of the train.

Councillor Wiper stated that he used the Metro a lot and that on the mornings when people were travelling to work, and normally had annual travel tickets, there were regularly ticket inspectors. However on a night when there were youths who may cause problems there was never any staff around.

Dr Smith agreed to feedback these issues to Nexus, however, Councillor Emerson advised that he was a member of the Integrated Transport Authority and agreed to raise the concerns at the next meeting and then report back to the Committee.

3. RESOLVED that the progress made on the actions detailed in the Action Plan be noted.

Community Cohesion Policy Review 2011/12: Setting the Scene

The Chief Executive submitted a report (copy circulated) which allowed Members to consider the background to the Committee's Policy Review into Community Cohesion.

(For copy report – see original minutes)

Jane Hibberd, Head of Strategy & Policy People & Neighbourhoods, along with Policy Officers Dawn Rugman and Sarah Woodhouse delivered a presentation which provided Members with a background to the idea of Community Cohesion, which had come about following riots in 2001, and how it worked in Sunderland along with the issues faced and the steps taken to tackle the issues.

The early focus had been around racial tensions however this had now been expanded to cover all aspects of community.

The Community Cohesion strategy would be getting refreshed in the next year and it had been agreed that this refresh would take place after the Committee's Policy Review had been completed so that the policy review could inform the updated strategy.

The Chairman thanked the officers for their presentation and stated that she thought of community cohesion as being like a jigsaw puzzle. She welcomed suggestions from Members regarding which strands the policy review could follow. Councillor Emerson had previously mentioned the changes to the housing benefit system and this was something that could be looked at. Show Racism the Red Card had expanded massively over the years and did a lot of work on tackling racism. There were area cohesion groups and each of these groups had a local Councillor on it who was the Equalities Champion for the area; these groups had representatives on them from a lot of local groups, organisations and authorities. She then queried whether the funding from the Home Office for 'Prevent', which had been set up to tackle terrorism, was still ongoing.

Ms Hibberd advised that there would not be funding for Prevent directed at Sunderland any more as the resources would be targeted at areas where it was likely that there would be issues.

The Chairman then stated that she sat on the inclusion board and she had been shocked to learn about the amount of hate crime there was against people with disabilities. Ted Cante had visited to Sunderland when he had been writing his report following the riots in Bradford, Oldham and Burnley in 2001; there had been a lot of people who had not been happy with his report. She also referred to the work that had been done to reduce the tribalism between schools which would help to reduce the fighting between groups of pupils from different schools.

Ms Woodhouse stated that Leslie Etherington from Thornhill School had been involved in the inter-school work as the operational lead.

Councillor T. Martin commented on the work that had been done around bringing the schools together; there had been groups set up where children from different schools were working together to improve relations. He then went on to state that in some of the cultures within the city men took the leading role in the family and community and this had the problem that the women from these communities were not integrated into the wider community as fully as they could be. He also commented that people with learning difficulties were often discriminated against and bullied.

Ms Woodhouse replied that there had been some work however there needed to be more done around the gender agenda. Ms Rugman added that there had been a joint prayer session arranged by a Catholic Vicar and this had been very successful. There were a number of projects ongoing which encouraged participation from all parts of the community.

Councillor Essl stated that the work with the schools seemed like a good idea; there was a need to improve cultural awareness. Prevent sounded like it was a classic case of getting funding simply because it was available, there was no real issue with violent extremism in Sunderland. In Millfield there had been a resident's association meeting to discuss the proposals for the mosque on St. Mark's road and this meeting had been hijacked by BNP supporters. There was a need to break down the barriers which caused communities to be isolated although this could be difficult as it could be difficult to get in contact with people within some communities. There were sessions which were only for Bangladeshi women, who were traditionally isolated from the wider community.

Ms Hibberd advised that in Sunderland Prevent had been more around promoting cohesion than preventing extremism. The Equalities Act had been updated and following this there was a need to update the Community Cohesion Strategy to ensure that it had the equality assessment incorporated into it.

Councillor Essl then referred to a session which had taken place for young women which people had not been able to find; he had asked about this session and it had seemed that no-one knew anything about it. Ms Woodhouse responded that some parts of the community would not allow young women to attend sessions outside of school and agreed to find out about this session and report back.

The Chairman thanked the officers for attending and it was:-

4. RESOLVED that the report be given consideration as part of the Committee's Policy Review into Community Cohesion.

Performance Report Quarter 4 (April – March 2011)

The Chief Executive submitted a report (copy circulated) which provided the Committee with a performance update against the former National Indicators relating to the period April – March 2011.

(For copy report – see original minutes)

Mike Lowe, Head of Performance Improvement, presented the report and advised that there had been reductions in crime rates for almost all of the types of crime and the overall number of crimes had fallen by 8 percent which equated to 1,637 fewer victims of crime. There had also been improvements on the indicators relating to environmental health.

The Chairman thanked Mr Lowe for his presentation and stated that there was a need to look at the indicators and priorities which were below the targets to ensure that work was done to tackle the issues.

Councillor Thompson stated that a recorded reduction in repeat victims of domestic violence was not necessarily a good thing as the reduction could be as a result of the victims not reporting incidents; there was a need to know how the reduction had come about. He also stated that drunk driving was only reported when people were caught.

Julie Smith, Associate Policy Lead for Community Safety, advised that an increase in drug offences was normally a sign of increased police activity;. The repeat domestic violence victims recorded were only those who were brought to the attention of the Multi Agency Risk Assessment Conference who would then be able to monitor the situation. It was good to see that the levels of repeat offences were reducing however domestic violence has the highest levels of repeat victimisation of any crime and so it still seemed like it was quite high.

5. RESOLVED that consideration be given to the continued good progress made by the council and the Sunderland Partnership.

Forward Plan – Key Decisions for the period 1 July 2011 – 31 October 2011

The Chief Executive submitted a report (copy circulated) to provide Members with an opportunity to consider those items on the Executive's Forward Plan for the period 1 July 2011 – 31 October 2011 which relate to the Community and Safer City Scrutiny Committee.

(For copy report – see original minutes).

The Chairman advised that there were no items on the current forward plan which fell under the remit of the Committee.

6. RESOLVED that the report be received and noted.

Work Programme 2011-12

The Chief Executive submitted a report (copy circulated) which provided, for Members information, the current work programme for the Committee's work for the 2011-12 Council year.

(For copy report – see original minutes)

7. RESOLVED that the work programme be received and noted.

(Signed) F. ANDERSON,
Chairman.