

At a meeting of the COMMUNITY AND SAFER CITY SCRUTINY COMMITTEE held in the CIVIC CENTRE on TUESDAY, 9TH FEBRUARY, 2010 at 5.30 p.m.

Present:-

Councillor Heron in the Chair

Councillors Ball, Paul Maddison, Scaplehorn and J. Walton.

Also in Attendance:-

Councillor Tate

Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were submitted to the meeting on behalf of Councillors Copeland, Morrissey, O'Connor, D. Smith, Speding and Timmins.

Minutes of the Last Meeting held on 12th January, 2010

1. RESOLVED that the minutes of the last meeting of the Committee held on 12th January, 2010 be confirmed and signed as a correct record.

Declarations of Interest (including Whipping Declarations)

There were no declarations of interest.

Policy Review – Anti Social Behaviour – Evidence Gathering

The Chief Executive submitted a report (copy circulated) to provide further evidence as part of the Committee's study into the work being undertaken by the Safer Sunderland Partnership into tackling anti social behaviour in the City.

(For copy report – see original minutes).

As part of the evidence gathering process, Mr. Alan Scott, Operations Manager, Youth Offending Service provided a brief presentation on the Challenges and Support Project and other initiatives targeting diversionary activities for young people.

(For copy presentation – see original minutes).

The Chairman commented on the figures for the Service and noted that they appeared to be very cost effective.

Mr. Scott advised that they were in the process of calculating the cost per head and could provide this at a later date.

Councillor Paul Maddison enquired as to the actual number of participants in the Service.

Mr. Scott advised that the percentages in the presentation were based on around 15 participants and that there were 20 participants across the year.

Councillor Paul Maddison enquired as to the criteria set to target youths in need of the support programme.

Mr. Scott informed the Committee that there were a number of criteria such as a youth not being in education, their peer groups, neighbourhood, health issues/substance misuse or housing arrangements. All of these issues were identified through an ONSET Comprehensive Assessment which gave them the opportunity to tailor interventions to meet specific needs.

Canon Stephen Taylor commented that the Empire Theatre ran schemes in the summer and were currently looking for people/volunteers which the youths on the programme may benefit from.

Canon Taylor also commented that he hoped the youths would be able to benefit from the City being successful in winning the Microsoft training programme.

Mr. Scott agreed that there were a number of possibilities for the youths to engage in and he would investigate further.

The Chairman commented that he was a believer in prevention rather than a cure and enquired as to where the referrals came from.

Mr. Scott advised that many participants in the programme were found through liaising with the Police and the Community Teams, direct referrals from schools and also through siblings.

The Chairman commented that one family member can cause a major disruption to the whole family and informed the Committee of an instance where he could not enrol a youth onto a programme because he had not been arrested.

Mr. Scott advised that Wear Kids would work with youths up until their final warning, so nobody would be excluded.

In response to Councillor Scaplehorn's query, Mr. Scott advised that they had a good working relationship with social landlords such as Gentoo and did receive referrals.

Councillor Scaplehorn enquired if problems occurred with a particular family, would they be highlighted by the Police.

Mr. Scott advised that the Police would highlight such situations and that they were looking to produce clear lists which they could share with the Police on a monthly basis so that nobody was missed.

Also in attendance was Nicky Rowland, Local Environment Manager and Marion Dixon, Environmental Health Manager (Environment) to brief the Committee on the work of the Enforcement Team in dealing with anti social behaviour in the City.

Unfortunately, Ms. Norma Johnston had been due to attend, but had suffered a family bereavement and the Chairman wished to send the Committee's condolences to Ms. Johnston.

Having given a short powerpoint presentation, Ms. Rowland and Ms. Dixon were on hand to answer Members queries.

(For copy presentation – see original minutes).

Councillor Paul Maddison enquired if the Enforcement Team had sufficient numbers of noise recording equipment.

Ms. Dixon advised that they currently had five noise recorders and would like more, but would also require more staff, so for the number of staff there was, they had a sufficient number of recorders.

Councillor Scaplehorn enquired if a person under investigation had to be informed that they were to be monitored, and commented that this would defeat the purpose.

Ms. Dixon advised that the person under investigation would receive a letter, informing them of the complaint and that they were to be monitored, but the investigation could be taken over a number of months, so they would not be told when they would be monitored.

In relation to the figures provided on fixed penalties issued, Councillor J. Walton commented that the East area may need further information with regards to the requirement to present household waste disposal in prescribed manner, due to the high numbers of penalties.

Councillor J. Walton also asked for Officers to expand further on the figures for inappropriate disposal of household waste.

Ms. Rowland advised that notices were served to occupiers which outlined exactly what could be disposed of in the bins. Fixed penalties were then given out, for any inappropriate items still being placed in the bins afterwards.

In response to Councillor J. Walton's query, Ms. Rowland advised that the East area figures were so high as it was recognised that there were a number of issues in that area, therefore most of the resources were directed in that region to start with.

Councillor Ball wished to say well done and informed the Committee of an email received thanking Officers for their service in cleaning up glass and litter, etc.

Councillor Scaplehorn also wished to congratulate the Officers that dealt with dog fouling for the service that they provided.

The Chairman commented that the local offices provided valuable knowledge of the areas when dealing with queries and wished to thank the street cleaners, that also serviced the shopping centres, who provided a fantastic job during all weather conditions.

Claire Harrison, Assistant Scrutiny Officer advised Members of site visits arranged in relation to the study and asked if they could confirm their attendance.

2. RESOLVED that Members note the evidence submitted as part of its study into anti social behaviour together with the proposed visits.

Local Area Agreement Delivery Plans

The Safer Sunderland Delivery Partnership submitted a report and powerpoint presentation (copy circulated) to provide the Committee with a Local Area Agreement Delivery Plan for those services delivered by partners who are members of the Safer Sunderland Delivery Partnership.

(For copy report and presentation – see original minutes).

Stuart Douglass, Safer Communities Manager presented the report along with Chief Inspector Parkes who advised that tackling Anti Social Behaviour was a key priority for the Police and that the statistics were being reduced but the public's perceptions and confidence needed to be addressed.

The Chairman commented on the Police and Communities Together (PACT) meetings, where they appeared to be getting the message across of a Safer City and help the public's perceptions. The Chairman also commented that it would be interesting to see the statistics in the future to compare.

Chief Inspector Parkes advised that attendance at the PACT meetings by the public had been variable, with some well attended and others not so, but the Police were doing a lot of work on engagement at present.

Councillor Paul Maddison enquired as to Chief Inspector Parkes views on the costs incurred through alcohol related crime.

Chief Inspector Parkes commented that they were trying to clamp down on the off licences but there was still evidence of alcohol related crime. They wanted to address the issue of people drinking at home before they go to the pubs and are looking to deny access, if they are already drunk.

Mr. Douglass also advised that if there were irresponsible promotions being offered by pubs, Licensing Officers would tackle on a case by case basis.

In relation to the sale of alcohol, Councillor Scaplehorn expressed concern over the number of shops and off licences applying to extend late night licences.

Chief Inspector Parkes agreed that the issuing of licences was quite liberal and would like to see the process tightened up but it was a problem most city centres faced.

Councillor Scaplehorn enquired if this Committee and the Partnership could focus on the issue of the licences being granted.

The Chairman informed the Committee that the PCT were already investigating the costs of drink related crime and that the problems with the licensing laws as they stood were that evidence was needed before the granting of a licence could be denied, irrespective of how many establishments were already in the area. Parliament needed to review the laws as the Council could only make decisions based on the licensing laws in place.

Mr. Douglass commented that there was a concern that we could only deal with an issue when a problem arose, rather than looking at prevention and it may be worth further investigation.

In response to the Chairman's query on drug recovery and if there had been special targeting of drug farms, Chief Inspector Parkes advised that it depended on the intelligence they received, which they had received quite a lot of recently.

Mr. Douglass commented that the Board had highlighted the issue and a lot of the intelligence had come from the community. Also the cannabis farms found were being cropped in the North East but distributed and consumed in other areas of the country.

In response to the Chairman's query on Drug Rehabilitation schemes, Mr. Douglass advised that there were Drug Intervention programmes which looked at a person's housing situation and such like and that the findings from research suggested the programmes worked better when people were enrolled via the Police/Courts.

Mr. Douglass also advised that Sunderland was generally very good in comparison to other cities, with it being in the top 3 of 15 for statistics in dealing with drugs/policing. Sunderland had been below the national crime rate for the last two, going into three years.

The Chairman commented that he still did not think the statistics for the perception of crime was correct and raised concerns that the newspapers only ever printed negative stories, never the good, which lead to a frightened community.

Mr. Douglass commented that the Partnership was doing a lot of work in promoting the work being done with the community.

Canon Stephen Taylor commented that the Sunderland Echo had been recruited onto the Partnership and had started to see a subtle change with more of a pride in Wearside and a positive approach in promoting Sunderland. It was not always the case you could get the press on board as we had done.

Canon Taylor also advised that the Safer Sunderland Partnership was one of the strongest for Partnership working and had been regularly praised, nationally. With the addition of Scrutiny, it was giving a healthy challenge to improve and was having a positive benefit.

The Chairman conceded that the Sunderland Echo had been better over the last two years but there was still room for improvement.

3. RESOLVED that the Committee note the content of the Delivery Plan and where appropriate focus its attention on those areas requiring further development to ensure that performance is actively managed.

Study into Anti Social Behaviour – ‘Not in my Neighbourhood – Week of Action’

The Chief Executive submitted a report (copy circulated) to provide an overview to the Committee on the ‘Week of Action’ which was held in support of the Home Office ‘Not in my Neighbourhood’ Week of action held between Monday 2nd and Friday 6th November, 2009 in the Sunderland West Neighbourhood Police area.

(For copy report – see original minutes).

Alan Mitchell, Community Safety Co-ordinator presented the report and commented that the LMAP’s were proving very effective on the ground and had been described as a master class in problem solving.

In relation to the week of action, Mr. Mitchell advised that consideration needed to be given to hold the scheme on a more suitable week than the 5th November, as it took away most of Police resources and to stay in a particular area for more than one day to see a greater effect.

There had been a good response from Northumbria Police and the week had been carried out on a shoestring budget yet had a real positive effect.

Mr. Mitchell also commented that the Partnership was second to none and could not speak highly enough of the Police.

Councillor J. Walton commented that it was pleasing to see the resurgence in Neighbourhood Watch Schemes as people had started to lose interest due to the dilution of Police Officer attendance and support.

Mr. Mitchell and Chief Inspector Parkes advised that Police Officers had needed to gain ground operationally during a period of high crime but were now in a more healthy position and could focus on public confidence with every Neighbourhood Watch Scheme to have an Officer to support it.

Councillor Scaplehorn commented that there had been a massive decline in Neighbourhood Watch Schemes over the past 3 years. There had been expressions of interest but no Co-ordinators to arrange the meetings and that this was to be addressed by Inspector Paul Barrett in the Washington area.

Chief Inspector Parkes advised that the Police were keen to get the Neighbourhood Watch Schemes increased and were looking to recruit a number of special constables along with current staff to help support.

Councillor Scaplehorn informed the Committee that he knew of three Neighbourhood Watch Schemes that had been trying to get established in Washington for over 12 months.

Chief Inspector Parkes commented that they could look into the matter further and try to help support the schemes.

Mr. Mitchell commented that there had been a massive investment in the past, which may not be possible to provide with the current constraints but could look to help support.

Mr. Douglass advised that a future report on the Policing Pledge was due to come before the Committee and suggested the Neighbourhood Watch/PACT mechanism figures be included with the report.

Chief Inspector Parkes advised that she would pass Councillor Scaplehorn's comments on, in that he was most encouraged by Inspector Paul Barrett and his ideas for reinvigorating the Neighbourhood Watch Schemes.

4. RESOLVED that the report and Members comments be noted.

Forward Plan – Key Decisions for the Period 1 February 2010 – 31 May 2010

The Chief Executive submitted a report (copy circulated) to update Members on the position with regard to the Executive's Forward Plan for the period of 1 February 2010 to 31 May 2010.

(For copy report – see original minutes).

The Chairman commented that it may be worth reminding Members at the beginning of the municipal year that the remit of this Committee also covers themes such as Licensing, Policy and Regulation, Community Associations and Registrars.

5. RESOLVED that the report be received and noted.

Work Programme 2009-10

The Chief Executive submitted a report (copy circulated) providing for Members information, the current Work Programme for the Committee's work during the 2009/10 Council year.

(For copy report – see original minutes).

6. RESOLVED that the information contained in the Work Programme be noted.

(Signed) R. HERON,
Chairman.