

At a meeting of the COMMUNITY AND SAFER CITY SCRUTINY COMMITTEE held in the CIVIC CENTRE on TUESDAY, 10th JANUARY, 2012 at 5.30 p.m.

Present:-

Councillor Anderson in the Chair

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

Apologies for Absence

All Members being in attendance there were no apologies for absence.

Minutes of the Last Meeting held on 6th December, 2011

The Chairman advised that it was hoped that there would be a presentation on Show Racism the Red Card at the next meeting of the Committee.

Jim Diamond, Scrutiny Officer, advised that there had been an error in the figures regarding youth offending and amended figures had been circulated to Members via email. He also advised that there had been an update on the Neighbourhood Helpline which would also be circulated to Members.

1. RESOLVED that the minutes of the last meeting of the Committee held on 6th December, 2011 be confirmed and signed as a correct record.

Declarations of Interest (including Whipping Declarations)

There were no declarations of interest.

Community Cohesion Policy Review 2011/12: Evidence Gathering

The Chief Executive submitted a report (copy circulated) which allowed Members to receive further evidence in relation to the Committee's Policy Review for 2011/12 into the development of Community Cohesion in Sunderland.

(For copy report – see original minutes)

Jenny Scott, Senior Policy Officer for People & Neighbourhoods, presented the update on ARCH, the hate incident reporting system which had been operating in Sunderland since 2007. She advised that the system was internet based and that it allowed members of the public to report hate incidents. It allowed for victims to be given support and enabled perpetrators to be caught. There was also a phone

service and there was the ability for reports to be made anonymously. She referred to the figures detailing the areas where incidents had taken place; there was a bias towards the East area which was due to there being a larger number of racially motivated incidents due to the large black and minority ethnic population, especially in Hendon and Millfield wards. There was also a high rate of incidents in the city centre which were alcohol related. There were also a large number of incidents in the North area which was related to the number of asylum seekers and refugees who were living in the area.

It was very good to see that there had been an increase in the levels of reporting of incidents however there were still a lot of incidents going unreported. Incidents of hate crimes against people with disabilities were also now being recorded. There had also been a pilot scheme in 5 schools in the city to tackle bullying and now a way to introduce a scheme across the city was being examined; there was a major problem with young people not reporting hate incidents.

The ARCH system was used across all of the Tyne and Wear authorities and there had been work carried out with the bus companies and Nexus as there were a number of incidents which took place on public transport.

There was a real need to increase people's knowledge of what a hate incident was and how they could report it to ensure that the reporting of incidents was increased.

The Chairman stated that it was shocking to hear that there were hate incidents against people with disabilities. It was however good that people were reporting incidents.

Ms Scott stated that it was shocking to hear about some of the things that people would do to others for no reason; a lot of victims would experience problems most days. Everyone had a responsibility to report any hate incidents they were victims of or witness to.

Councillor Wiper referred to the map which had been circulated. It appeared that there were more incidents in 2008 than in any other year. He queried whether there had been a decrease in incidents. Ms Scott replied that the map was not very clear given its small size; there had been an increase in the number of reported incidents every year.

Councillor Essl queried whether the proposals for the building of the mosque on St Marks Road had lead to increased tensions in the Millfield Area. He also asked how Sunderland compared to other cities in the area and asked for an explanation of why there had been so many incidents in the North area.

Ms Scott advised that there had not been an increase in incidents reported in Millfield however there was intelligence and anecdotal evidence that there had been increased tensions in the area. It was difficult to compare Sunderland with other local cities given that there were vast differences in the number of incidents between different areas within the city. In the North area a lot of the incidents were related to shopkeepers being abused; there was also a high number of asylum seekers in the area who were victims.

Councillor Essl then went on to state that EDL had been active in the Millfield area and had been organising meetings. He queried whether there were procedures in place to monitor the situation.

Stuart Douglass advised that work was being done in conjunction with the police to combat the community tension issues and this issue was a priority.

Ms Scott added that it was known that the far right were operating in Millfield and the cohesion networks were looking at longer term strategies for the area to tackle the issues.

In response to a query from Councillor Emerson, Ms Scott advised that she would provide a breakdown of the incidents which had occurred on public transport. There was a need for the front line staff such as drivers to be trained in how to deal with incidents to ensure that staff knew the most appropriate way to tackle incidents. There had been work done with Nexus and also the local bus operators.

Councillor Copeland informed the Committee of her experiences as a victim; over 20 years ago she had become the first Neighbourhood Watch Co-ordinator in the North area and since then had suffered ongoing problems including abuse, threats and damage to her property; she had never thought of this as being hate crime and wondered whether it might be classed as hate crime.

Ms Scott advised that this was an interesting example; she did not think that it would be classified as a hate crime using the strict definition. The safer communities partnership was looking at ways of helping people who had vulnerabilities which put them at risk of being a victim.

The Chairman stated that she had also been a victim, her house had been vandalised purely because of which football team she supported.

Councillor Thompson referred to the use of social media and the problems this could cause. Ms Scott advised that and comments made on social networks which could incite hatred could be reported using the ARCH system. Issues needed to be reported as this allowed the problems to be identified which then enabled the appropriate action to be taken. In Sunderland there was a Case Analysis Group which was made up of representatives from the police, victim support, gentoo and the council's neighbourhood relations team.

Councillor T. Martin queried whether ARCH was a name or an acronym. He was advised by Ms Scott that it had originally stood for Agencies against Racist Crime and Harassment however as the remit had expanded it was now merely a name.

Ms Scott then informed the committee that ARCH was open to the public and anyone could report incidents. All reports would be investigated and where possible victims would be given support.

The Chairman thanked Ms Scott for her attendance and welcomed Dawn Rugman who would be delivering a presentation on the Equality Forums.

Ms Rugman, Senior Partnership Officer (Cohesion and Inclusion), delivered a PowerPoint presentation which detailed the work that was taking place and also introduced Chris Heskett who was a member of the LGBT forum and was in attendance to advise the committee of some of the issues faced by the LGBT community.

Ms Rugman advised that the Independent Advisory Groups were established in 2006 in partnership with Northumbria Police; initially they had been set up to provide a single point of contact for consulting with hard to reach groups within the city. It had been difficult to set up the groups and break down the trust barriers with the people the groups were targeting.

Throughout 2011/12 there had been improvements made to the groups. An evaluation of the effectiveness of the Inclusive Communities Group had prompted changes to how the group was managed. There had been an Issues Log introduced which tracked the progress of issues raised by the groups. There had also been development of a wider range of methods for people to become involved; web pages, Facebook and other newly emerging means of communication had been used to provide information.

Mr Heskett stated that he had been involved with the Wear Out project which had involved working on engaging with members of the LGBT community. Research had shown that in Sunderland there were 17,250 people who were LGBT. It had been found that a lot of LGBT people in Sunderland were likely to leave the city for places such as Newcastle or Manchester as these cities provided for the community more than Sunderland. There were also problems with bullying with 65 percent of young LGBT people being victims of bullying which affected their school work. With regard to housing 1 in 5 LGBT people expected to be treated worse and 25 percent had experienced negative attitudes when accessing health services. There was also a problem with bullying taking place within the workplace.

Mr Heskett then went on to advise that the community was not well catered for in terms of leisure and members of the community often received abuse when using leisure facilities. There was a gay night in the city centre pubs and clubs on a Tuesday night however there was only a small proportion of the community who made use of this night. He felt that there was a need for more people to be open about their needs and the visibility of the LGBT community needed to be increased.

The Chairman commented that she used to sit on the inclusion board and at the time there were no representatives from the LGBT community on the board, in general at that time there was very little engagement and it was good to see that there was now more engagement with the LGBT community. She also stated that people should be able to be open about their sexuality without being made to feel uncomfortable or be harassed. There was a need for more people to be open. She also asked whether LGBT people felt safe socialising in Sunderland.

Mr Heskett advised that those people who went out on a Tuesday night were obviously comfortable being open and socialising in Sunderland. Plans were in place to consult with the community to find out about their experiences of living and

socialising in Sunderland. Ms Rugman added that there had been a basic exercise carried out to find out the perceptions of LGBT people; it had been found that a lot of them did not feel safe in Sunderland. This could lead to them taking their social life out of the city which would not be good for the city.

Sarah Woodhouse, Senior Partnership Officer, advised that there were still problems for young people which were not changing; the term 'gay' was still used negatively and youth workers were often not comfortable tackling stereotypes. If there were no changes made to the perceptions of young people then there would be no possibility of attitudes changing in the city in the long term.

Councillor Copeland stated that she had visited a gay pub in Newcastle and there had been a very friendly, welcoming environment in this pub, including towards straight people; within Newcastle the gay community was much more welcomed and integrated than in Sunderland; there was a need to integrate the community more in Sunderland. She felt that there was a need for families to provide support and encouragement to their relatives who were LGBT. She also informed Members that there had been a women's tea party arranged for 17th January which was intended to help break down barriers within the Bangladeshi community by allowing everyone to come together to discuss issues which were of concern to women within the community.

In response to a query from Councillor Scaplehorn Mr Heskett stated that there was a need for people to try to understand the needs of the different people who made up the city and to engage with the different communities within the city. He had a report on understanding prejudice which he would email to Members.

Ms Woodhouse stated that there had already been services lost due to funding cuts and it was minority groups who were being hit hardest as they had limited services available to them and these services were now under threat.

Councillor Copeland had referred to the possibility of speaking with members of the LGBT community to find their opinions on the city. Mr Heskett advised that the Partnership group was looking to set up an engagement session in March and this could be the ideal time for Members to meet with the community.

2. RESOLVED that the report be given consideration as part of the Committee's policy review into Community Cohesion.

Police Reform and Social Responsibility Act 2011 – Update

The Chief Executive submitted a report (copy circulated) which provided Members with an update on the Police Reform and Social Responsibility Act 2011 and its implications for the Council.

(For copy report – see copy report)

Stuart Douglass, Lead Policy for Community Safety, presented the report and advised that the Police and Crime Commissioner and Police and Crime Panel would

cover all of the Northumbria Police force area. It was not known who any of the candidates would be locally however nationally it was known that the major political parties would be fielding candidates for the role of commissioner. Any individual would be able to stand for election as long as they were British, Commonwealth or EU citizens aged over 18, were resident in the police force area for which they wanted to stand and had never been convicted of an imprisonable offence. There were also restrictions based on employment which were detailed fully in the guidance for potential candidates. The funding for this year would continue to be provided to the Safer Sunderland Partnership however from next year the funds would be provided to the Commissioner. The staff currently employed by the police authority would remain in post for six months however after that it would be down to the new commissioner to appoint their own staff in accordance with the guidelines.

The Police and Crime Panel would be replacing the existing Police Authority and would be made up of at least 10 Elected Members from across the force area and 2 co-opted members. It was possible for up to 20 members to sit on the panel; this was something to be decided by the local authorities within the force area. Within the area there were around 400 councillors and the panel should be representative of both the political and geographical make up of the area. Elected Mayors would be automatically given a seat on the panel although they could then delegate this responsibility to another Member of their local authority.

Councillor Scaplehorn queried the impact of the Safer Sunderland Partnership losing the funding. Mr Douglass stated that some services such as the Street Pastors had been kept however there was a need to prove that services were required in order to secure them. There would no longer be the ability to give funding to these services and as such there was a need to look at the feasibility of providing resources such as staff. There had been discussions with the Street Pastors to decide what support they could be given.

Councillor Copeland referred to the safer homes initiative which had been a victim of the funding cuts; there were CCTV cameras in Southwick which had been installed under this initiative but there was now no money available to replace the cameras.

The Chairman commented that there was not long left until the elections and so far everything had been very low key; she had not heard anything through the Labour party about potential candidates. She also stated that when she was a councillor for the now defunct Tyne and Wear County Council she had sat on the police authority; at this time there had been very little scope to hold the Chief Constable to account; she hoped that the new panel would have more power than the police authority had. She then went on to query whether there would be any secondary legislation on the matter. Mr Douglass advised that the panel would not have the power to scrutinise the Chief Constable but would be able to scrutinise the Commissioner. There would be secondary legislation produced which would contain guidance on the workings of the commissioner and panel.

Councillor Thompson stated that whoever was elected as commissioner would be the most high profile Politician in the region and he was concerned that a single issue candidate could be elected.

Mr Douglass then informed the Committee that one of the recommendations to come out of the proposals was for changes in the way children's safeguarding services were provided. He also advised that there were proposals for the commissioner to be responsible for the commissioning of victim support services within the area.

Councillor Copeland commented that it was excellent that victims were going to be given support, it was often difficult to provide support to victims and she wanted to see the victims being put first.

3. RESOLVED that the update be noted and the Committee receive further updates on the progress of the Act.

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)

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

Forward Plan – Key Decisions for the period 1 January 2012 – 30 April 2012

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 January 2012 – 30 April 2012 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.

5. RESOLVED that the report be received and noted.

(Signed) F. ANDERSON,
Chairman.