

At a meeting of the COMMUNITY AND SAFER CITY SCRUTINY COMMITTEE held in the CIVIC CENTRE on TUESDAY, 7TH JUNE, 2011 at 5.30 p.m.

Present:-

Councillor Anderson in the Chair

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

Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were submitted to the meeting on behalf of Councillor T. Martin.

Minutes of the Last Meeting held on 5th April, 2011

1. RESOLVED that the minutes of the last meeting of the Committee held on 5th April, 2011 be confirmed and signed as a correct record.

Declarations of Interest (including Whipping Declarations)

There were no declarations of interest.

Annual Work Programme and Policy Review 2011-12

The Chief Executive submitted a report (copy circulated) which requested Members to determine the work programme for the year and identify a main theme for a detailed policy review.

(For copy report – see original minutes)

Stuart Douglass, Lead Policy for Community Safety, presented the report and informed Members of the previous policy reviews the Committee had completed which were detailed in paragraph 3.3 of the report; he also advised Members of the proposals for topics for the policy review for 2011-12 which were detailed in the table at paragraph 3.5 of the report. These topics had been identified at the Annual Scrutiny Conference.

Charlotte Burnham, Head of Scrutiny and Area Arrangements, advised that there was normally one policy review topic chosen for discussion throughout the year.

Jim Diamond, Scrutiny Officer, advised that for the past three years the Committee had examined crime related issues for the policy review and advised that the remit of the Committee, which was detailed at paragraph 2.1 of the report, was much broader than that and covered a wide range of issues.

The Chairman commented that the work surrounding Community Cohesion had not received the prominence it should have; the Regeneration Review Committee had looked at the issue of community cohesion in 2002 but made limited progress due to it being a relatively new concept at the time and there being little by way of detailed central guidance. Community Cohesion covered all parts of the communities and saw all agencies working together. There had been a pilot scheme in Southwick to identify how the work could improve the area and reduce poverty. There were Community Cohesion groups which were area based and aimed to bring together the community to combat problems. She was of the opinion that Community Cohesion would be the most suitable topic for the Committee to discuss as its policy review.

Councillor Emerson agreed with this as Community Cohesion sat as an umbrella for all of the topics which had been identified.

Councillor Copeland also agreed that Community Cohesion would be the best choice. Deprivation lead to crime and also left people feeling like they were not a part of the community. The North Area Committee had provided £1,000 to provide a meal for families which had worked well to bring these families back into the community.

Councillor Essl referred to the problems around Eden Vale; there was the issue of younger residents wanting to play football on the open spaces and older residents were not happy with it.

Councillor Forbes stated that all of the proposed topics were interesting; the Changing Drug Scene had jumped out as a possible topic given that it would link into crime and given that there were services to help get people off drugs which help to prevent reoffending.

The Chairman advised that regardless of which topic was chosen the other areas would not be excluded.

Ms Burnham advised that there would be monitoring reports from the previous policy reviews submitted to the Committee throughout the year and these would provide updates on drugs and crime in relation to the previous policy reviews.

Councillor Copeland commented that in Southwick there were a number of clinics which provided methadone and the clients of these clinics had lead to there being a huge increase in crime in the area.

Ms Douglass stated that the previous government had been keen to reduce heroin use by providing methadone for addicts; the new Coalition government had

proposed an abstinence approach to rehabilitation and as such the clinics providing methadone would not be working with as many addicts. There was a population of approximately 900 to 1000 people in Sunderland who were addicted to heroin or methadone. He agreed to bring a scoping report to the Committee to provide an overview of what was happening should Members wish.

The Chairman stated that it would be useful if such a report was provided and queried whether cocaine use was increasing in the city.

Mr Douglass commented that there had always been a small proportion of the drug using population were taking cocaine and while the overall population of drug users was staying approximately the same the proportions were changing. There were proposals for a two day induction for Members on Community Safety which would provide an opportunity to meet with key partners and would provide an overview of the legislation and an opportunity to visit projects within the city.

The Chairman commented that this induction would be a good opportunity to meet with the partnerships and also stated that crime prevention initiatives should be looked into.

Councillors Forbes and Wiper stated that this was a good idea and Councillor Wiper also stated that it was important for Members to be notified of the dates.

Mr Douglass advised that the two days would not necessarily be consecutive.

Councillor Copeland stated that the induction was an excellent idea. She also referred to the XL Youth Villages which had kept young people off the streets and out of trouble; she hoped the funding would continue. She also stated that she had been out on a night with the street pastors and had spoken to the door staff and taxi marshals who were there to reduce crime and fear of crime for people enjoying the evening economy of the city centre.

Mr Douglass advised that there was the desire to prevent young people from wanting to commit offences. A session was to be arranged with the police control centre.

Mr Diamond then stated that following this meeting a report detailing the remit of the policy review would be written.

Councillor Forbes stated that she wanted drugs to be included as an important part of the work programme.

2. RESOLVED that:-

- a. The Annual Work Programme be given consideration
- b. Community Cohesion be selected as the Policy Review topic for the year.

Food Law Enforcement Service Plan 2011/12

The Chief Executive submitted a report (copy circulated) which advised Members of the Food Law Enforcement Service Plan for 2011/12. The report was an Article 4 Plan under the Council's Constitution and was the primary document for promoting food safety and would be considered by Cabinet at its meeting on 22nd June, 2011.

(For copy report – see original minutes)

John Smith, Environmental Health Manager (Commercial), presented the report and advised that the plan had been produced as a requirement of the Food Standards Agency (FSA) which required authorities to produce the service plan on an annual basis.

Mr Smith advised that the primary aim of the department was to protect the health of everyone in the city in relation to food safety matters and also advised that the County Analyst Laboratory in Durham would be closing.

In response to questioning he stated that he believed this closure was due to Durham County Council no longer subsidising the lab. Any samples which required testing would be sent to alternative laboratories elsewhere in the country. It was not anticipated that there would be any significant delay in receiving results and there would not be an increase in the cost of having the analysis carried out. The analysts normally waited until there were a number of similar jobs to be carried out in order to keep the costs down. Where there was a result needed urgently it was possible to request an urgent response.

The Chairman stated that she was not happy about the closure of the Durham lab however she accepted that Sunderland had no control over what Durham County Council does.

Mr Smith then informed Members of initiatives such as the Healthy Homes Award and the Scores on the Doors scheme. There was to be a national scheme implemented by the FSA and it was planned that this would be launched on 28th June. The Scores on the Doors scheme covered all food outlets including takeaways. It was still not known whether the FSA scheme would replace the Council's scores on the doors scheme or whether they would operate alongside each other.

He then referred to the recent E.Coli outbreak and stated that washing vegetables was a sensible precaution and it was important to cook food properly and follow the cooking instructions. He also informed Members that most contamination of foods occurred within the home.

Mr Smith advised that when inspections of food premises were taking place there was no advance warning of the visits. In response to a query from Councillor Curran he advised that the operators needed to co-operate with the inspection staff and there was a good level of co-operation from operators. The service had legal powers for dealing with problem premises however it was very rare that these powers needed to be used.

Mr Smith then informed Members that the department would routinely provide advice when visiting premises and businesses could also request advice; over the last year there had been 35 requests for advice from businesses. He then referred to the sampling exercises which had been carried out. Two of the commercial dishwashers tested had been found to contain E.Coli however this had been traced to faults within the machines and once the machines had been repaired there had not been any issues.

Councillor Copeland commented that it was possible for dishwashers to be dirty inside; it was important to remember to keep cleaning materials clean; it was also important to teach food hygiene and cleanliness to premises operators.

Mr Smith agreed that it was important to ensure that cleaning equipment was kept clean. He also referred to a case of an E.Coli outbreak in Wales which had been traced to cross contamination of a vacuum packing machine. It was important to ensure that raw and cooked foods were kept separate.

Councillor Wiper queried whether the authority had the powers to close down premises and Mr Smith advised that this was the case and the department had closed down premises in the past. It was however a last resort and would only happen if there was a serious, imminent risk of infection. The department preferred to identify problems early and prevent them from escalating.

In response to queries from Councillor Thompson, Mr Smith advised that the standard timetable for inspections was every six months however should there be any issues identified then the visits would be taking place more frequently. The scores were based on the results of the visits and would not change until the next inspection even though it was likely that standards would have improved following the initial inspection. Freedom of Information requests for the inspection reports were difficult to comply with; it would be easier if a direct request for specific information was received.

Following a query from Councillor Copeland Mr Smith advised that the frequency of inspections for shops selling cold cooked meat depended on the rating the premises had been given following its previous inspection.

He advised Members of the financial allocation for the department. Councillor Forbes requested a breakdown of the internal recharges and external costs. Mr Smith stated that he would need to speak to accountancy to get this information and agreed to provide the information to the Scrutiny Officer for circulation to Members.

Mr Smith then went on to advise of the organisation of the department; there was only a small team working on food related work however they did a large amount of work. He also advised of the areas for improvement which were set out in the report and stated that it was difficult to improve given that the department was already performing so well.

The Chairman congratulated Mr Smith and the other officers involved in producing the report which was a fascinating piece of work; she also thanked the officers for working hard to keep the city safe.

3. RESOLVED that the comments of the Committee be referred to Cabinet for consideration.

Forward Plan – Key Decisions for the period 1 June 2011 – 30 September 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 June 2011 – 30 September 2011 which relate to the Community and Safer City Scrutiny Committee.

(For copy report – see original minutes).

4. RESOLVED that the report be received and noted.

Prior to closing the meeting the Chairman expressed concerns over the change in the meeting cycle from a 4 week cycle to a 6 week cycle. She felt that Members should have been consulted regarding this change and also felt that there was no need for the change to have been made.

Charlotte Burnham, Head of Scrutiny and Area Arrangements, advised that the IDeA had carried out a review of the scrutiny arrangements and they had recommended that the authority look at the cycle of meetings and how much work was carried out outside of the meetings. There had been a lot of discussions with the Chairs and Vice-Chairs and it had been agreed that the 6 week cycle would be piloted for a year. The Committee could hold extra meetings should they feel that there was the need to.

The other Members also expressed concerns over the change and the lack of consultation and they asked for a guarantee that they would be consulted at the conclusion of the pilot period.

Ms Burnham confirmed that all Members would be consulted and reiterated that all of the Chairs and Vice-Chairs had been consulted and that this change had been made with the best interests of scrutiny in mind.

The Chairman then thanked everyone for their attendance and closed the meeting.

(Signed) F. ANDERSON,
Chairman.