

Minutes

CRIME & DISORDER JOINT SCRUTINY REVIEW

MINUTES OF THE CRIME & DISORDER JOINT SCRUTINY REVIEW HELD ON TUESDAY 6 JULY 2010, IN COMMITTEE ROOM 1, WYCOMBE DISTRICT COUNCIL, COMMENCING AT 3.05 PM AND CONCLUDING AT 5.15 PM.

MEMBERS PRESENT

Mr W Bendyshe-Brown (Wycombe District Council), Mr T Egleton (Buckinghamshire County Council) (C), Mr A Oxley (South Bucks District Council), Mr B Roberts (Buckinghamshire County Council), Mr P Rogerson (Wycombe District Council) and Mr J Wertheim (Chiltern District Council)

OFFICERS PRESENT

Ms N Ahmad and Ms S Yapp

1 WELCOME BY THE CHAIRMAN

The Chairman welcomed Members to the meeting.

2 APOLOGIES / CHANGES IN MEMBERSHIP

Apologies were received from:

Julie Burton
Arif Hussain

3 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

4 SETTING THE SCENE

The Chairman set the scene of the meeting as follows:

Background

The Chairman explained that this was the second of the evidence gathering meetings for the joint County and District crime and disorder review. The aims of the review were both to explore how the Safer and Stronger Bucks Partnership Board is fulfilling its crime and disorder



INVESTOR IN PEOPLE



functions and to improve how we work with partners to communicate messages to residents that help reduce the fear of crime.

This topic was chosen as reducing the fear of crime is a key priority in the recently agreed Safer Bucks Plan, and there continues to be disparity between falling crime rates overall in Buckinghamshire and residents' perception about the prevalence of criminal activity in their local area.

Purpose

Contributors had been invited to talk to members of the task and finish group about their community safety role. They were asked to inform members about current work they are undertaking with partners which is aimed at reducing the fear of crime, and to explain how their organisation communicates messages about crime rates etc to residents. In addition they were asked to identify where they thought improvements could be made and barriers to progress.

Time	Name	Organisation
3.10pm	Bryan Dugdale	Bucks Fire and Rescue Service
3.50pm	Paul Emmings Commander and Chairman of the Safer and Stronger Bucks Partnership Board	Thames Valley Police

First contributor – Bryan Dugdale

The Chairman welcomed Brian to the meeting.

Brian introduced himself and explained that he works for Bucks Fire and Rescue Service. He has been at Bucks for 32 years and has had varied positions. The first 20 years he spent working in High Wycombe and the last 5 years he has been in charge of the Fire Safety Partnership.

The Fire Safety Partnership is informed by an integrated risk management plan. There is a neighbourhood plan in each District. The High Wycombe neighbourhood plan, for example, has activities from neighbourhood action groups, which also serves the aim of the plan. The demographic and broad profile is supported with a locality map, and includes details of fire and risk areas.

The main service areas are:

- Prevention and detection
- Response
-

The Fire and Rescue Service has 11 significant partnerships. The Community Safety Partnership is important and one we support at District & County level.

- Demographic risk analysts
- Performance manager
- Road safety officer at County and District levels.

Initiatives carried out by Bucks Fire and Rescue are as follows:

1. The Home Safety Check Scheme started in Chiltern District Council in 2005. There have been 8,000 visits to homes and 9,000 to other agencies, for example, adult social care. The delivery of the checks is carried out by operational crews and each station has targets, High Wycombe for example, has a target of 1,300 per year.

2. There are also wide-ranging youth engagement courses that are delivered by the team which feed into different curriculum areas and include the dangers of being involved in crime. Working with youth offenders, the Police and Ambulance authorities, the courses are intensive and focus on outcomes to reduce anti-social behaviour.

3. There is also a Fire Setter Scheme for younger children up to the age of 16 and a different version for youths aged 16 to adult.

4. Community cohesion is a legislative requirement and is an important part of the work of the service; reflecting the multi-cultural population that exists in Buckinghamshire.

From September, the Service will be carrying out engagement work with the Local Area Forums (LAF's). This will involve providing them with fire data and information on risk reduction which it is hoped will feed into neighbourhood plans.

The lead authority for the reduction of crime has seen a reduction in arson in the last five years. Metal detectors are used to collect intelligence and evidence to assist in fire investigations; last years there were 1,100 such investigations.

There are reports which are generated from an information sharing hub for analysis; this data is passed on to the Joint Action Group (JAG).

In relation to Anti-Social Behaviour (ASB), BFFS has contributed to the strategy, which provides some solutions for offenders' e.g. fire setters.

The Members then asked questions. The questions and answers are summarised below.

What is demographic risk management?

We have a number of tools, such as MOASIC and ACORN, which provide comparative, demographic information about the local area. Not all serve the purpose of targeting health and safety checks where we believe they are most needed. The Vulnerable Localities Index (VLI), which was founded by the Jill Dando institute, monitors community tension and is an indicator of fire and risk which has been held up as good practice. This information is adapted for our purpose and we are confident we can identify the most at risk groups.

I am on the fire authority panel and the work is good. But in relation to the perception of crime, if you ask in the street, people wouldn't know. How do you think the partnership is dealing with perception and do you feel you are getting support?

We have come a long way in two years at District and County level because the local area agreement serves to reduce the perception of crime and the home checking scheme assists it. I support the Local Area Agreement concept and it is a shame to lose what it has given us at County and District level. Fire stations are more aware of priorities and fire drivers should know of the tensions in their area. We are supported by the community safety partnership where requested, so we are moving in the right direction.

Are people worried about arson, can you give us an indication about the fear of arson people have? Is it on a commercial of local level?

Seven to eight years ago there were a lot of abandoned cars, but there has been a change in legislation and there are less now. The scrapage scheme has also provided a stable scrap metal price to keep cars off the streets. The removal of rubbish also has a positive effect on people's perception.

What about the fear of ethnic arson?

15 months ago we had great success in an ethnic minority group (they stated they had a fear of arson.) Local leaders assured the community that the checks were valid and would be provided free of charge.

Did this alleviate the fear of crime?

I do believe the fear was alleviated and I do not detect an upsurge of fear. We also carry out a review to check this and maintain our investment in the area.

How do you alleviate fear of crime that is particularly relevant to rural areas?

At the last Buckinghamshire County Council show, there were rural safety packs provided by the partnership. The pack included information for farmers and businesses in rural areas and included a rural risk management strategy. This risk management strategy has been implemented in the Pitstone and Ivinghoe areas. This is a perception issue and is very important to monitor interest at LAF and parish meetings to raise our profile.

It is important in rural areas to know what is being done, a reduction in perception would be good, but we need more communication. Is there scope for linking your communications with partners?

We do get approached by people who want to use our marketing material and we share information with the community safety partnerships. Our communication officer is a member of County communications group. We generate press releases every week and we have lots of hits on our website.

Some young people in Princes Risborough burnt down some toilets; they were taken in and talked to about the implications of starting fires. This was successful and it would be good if more work of this nature could be carried out.

We are working with schools and have had good feedback from them that this kind of work raises self esteem in young people.

It would help young people who are on the cusp of crime. If we can have a programme of work in this area it would solve a lot of problems.

I agree; there are other courses which are based on offences. Some offenders are persuaded to attend and we have positive feedback.

In relation to health and safety checks that were carried out, there were 8,000 visits to homes in terms of adult social care. How many of the 8,000 households you dealt with were actually worried about crime?

I can get these figures and pass them on; they are available and are updated monthly.

Action: Bryan Dugdale / Claire Street

Does the press officer do joint press releases?

Yes, if relevant, for example if an arsonist is convicted.

We need to get positive messages out to residents, for example in parish magazines as this information would be very useful.

A lot of local people are online now, and we need to focus on using this medium too. People do not realise the range of services that Bucks Fire and Rescue provides. This is something we need to look at.

The Chairman thanked Brian for attending.

Second Contributor – Paul Emmings

The Chairman welcomed Paul Emmings to the meeting.

Paul introduced himself as Commander and Chairman of the Safer and Stronger Bucks Partnership Board. He has been in the role since 1 April in Buckinghamshire and before this was the LPA commander for High Wycombe.

Paul handed round a diagram, which shows on a chart the targets in relation to how well Buckinghamshire County Council has performed. This is summarised below:

1. Bucks County Council is achieving exceptionally well against the 15% target.
2. In terms of reduction in crime, Aylesbury Vale didn't perform well last year but it had the best confidence of all the District areas.
3. Chiltern District Council. There have been changes in how crime is being tackled and performance has improved in line with the targets.
4. High Wycombe was the best performing for Thames Valley with 24% reduction in crime but they had the worst confidence figures. The communication partnership won a national award for the work that was done, but struggled to get the message out to the public.

A Member asked how confidence was measured. Paul advised that three different surveys were currently conducted as follows:

1. Place Survey
2. Bucks Community Safety Survey
3. Thames Valley Police (TVP) Survey each month.

Paul stated that there were costs involved with the use of surveys. The TVP monthly survey involved ringing people in the local police area and asking them questions about how safe they felt. Unfortunately people sometimes use the surveys to report other, non-crime related problems such as potholes.

Paul advised that the different areas in Buckinghamshire had various communication methods available to them. For instance, Aylesbury has a radio station, press and a pro-active LPA commander, but in High Wycombe there is nothing, the radio has closed down. The Bucks Free Press is very web based and has a limited audience.

Paul's view was that there needs to be a different process to engage with communities and the most challenging Police areas. He stressed that it is difficult to get good news stories in, for instance, the Bucks Free Press, however he had negotiated that they receive regular updates from him..

There was lots of good work going on but this needed to be learnt from to raise the standard. Paul explained that Ian Hunter was Commander for the Chilterns Area, and he was helping to raise confidence in Bucks by the establishment of the Public Confidence Board. Confidence could be raised further by drawing together and utilising media contacts, using all agencies and getting the message out by looking at all tiers, including, NHS, Police and County level. Paul's view was that communication needs to be both internal and external; so that everyone can see what the commanders are doing each month. Additionally, people may know the challenges in their own areas, but not in others.

The Members then asked questions. The questions and answers are summarised below:

How many burglaries have there been in Bucks?

At the moment there are 5 burglaries a day, 2 cars stolen, 7 broken into and 1 robbery. There are a total of 15 offences a day in Bucks.

Members agreed that this is a great message which should be clearly communicated to residents. There seemed to be a perception that High Wycombe was not a safer area and yet crime figures did not reflect this. Paul advised that data confirmed that High Wycombe is safer than, for instance, Banbury on a Friday and Saturday night.

Members discussed the fact that the age profile in High Wycombe town seemed to be mainly students and young people and they wondered if this meant that older people might feel uncomfortable going into the town centre, particularly at night.

Paul responded that there were issues at 2 -4am on Friday and Saturday's. This was made worse by people coming out of pubs and clubs and then getting takeaways.

A member commented that although this might only happen on Friday and Saturdays, it would stay in their mind all week and this is what the fear of crime does.

Is there something that licensing need to address? What about licensing hours?

Paul advised that there are saturation policies that can be run, but High Wycombe does not have the associated criminality. It can be costly to manage licensing hours and more so with the longer hours. We need to try and deal with it in different ways. It is challenging and if hours are condensed it will be more manageable.

The Chairman said that this was not only in relation to town centres but also suburban streets, for example, Farnham Common brings in people from Slough. This affects the suburbs, and the town centres have this multiplied.

Are your figures realistic? We tell people to report crime but they don't.

Paul advised that burglaries, dwelling robberies and car related crime is well reported, but the Police were not always made aware of other types of crime, such as domestic violence, from the start of this occurring.

How do you think we should get the message out to reduce the fear of crime?

You have got to make use of what you have, community messages are key. Ian Hunter has good practice in this area.

Do you meet with your colleagues and produce joint messages to help reduce the fear of crime?

Paul explained that this was not working well yet but there is a new confidence plan to pull it all together. TVP, Districts and County need to work together and focus on certain areas. There needs to be a clear communication strand that runs throughout partners.

Increasing public confidence does not reduce crime rates?

Crime rates are going down, but we need to increase public confidence further. South Bucks has spent a lot of time tackling crime and at the moment this is down 24%. Offender management is key and we have the funding for a project which is just starting for this purpose.

South Bucks crime figures are higher. What communications do you have between yourselves and Berkshire?

It is all linked in and there are meetings so that we know what is going on. Partnership working is taken forward through the Joint Action Groups.

The Acting Head of Service for Localities and Safer Communities went on to say that there the integrated offender management scheme would work in association with Slough, to our benefit.

A member stressed the need to bring all the various partnership working together and to link in the Fire Service more. He expressed the view that there are two tests for the perception of crime:

1. Are you safe in your home?
2. Are you safe in the street?

Do you agree? If the streets are safer it will bring a greater change in the perception of crime.

Paul did not agree that it was necessarily that simple as there were a number of issues that could be specific to certain areas.

What test would you apply?

Paul's view was that the tests should be: Do you feel safe? What is it driven by? What do you know and not know about crime and what do you know about nationally?

An officer contributed by saying that we need to enquire how many people are affected by knife crime and communicate messages about this. This is important because two people may have died of knife crime nationally and the subsequent media coverage makes people afraid.

The Chairman agreed that it was the national news which was creating people's fear of crime.

What would you do to get key messages across?

There should be an integrated communications structure across the County. Ideally, there needs to be increased Police resources and increased Police funding.

The Chairman said that Paul had made the point about communication very well and the need to pool together resources, which was something the Task and Finish Group would be pushing for. He added that numbers of crime could put, for instance, in local mediums such as the parish magazine.

An Officer went on to say that the I:ON Bucks website provided a useful data source for people wanting information on crime rates.

There had not yet been a big launch on I:ON Bucks because it was a phased roll out and there was a soft launch through libraries. It was agreed that the website address would be circulated to members.

Action: Susie Yapp / Claire Street

The Chairman thanked Paul for attending.

5 REVIEW OF KEY POINTS

Following the two contributors there was a review of the key points raised in the meeting. These key points are summarised below:

- There were two tests that could be applied to the fear of crime: Do I feel safe at home and do I feel safe in the street? However, the perception about crime could be dependent on a number of factors.
- Anti Social Behaviour and burglary were two main areas that seemed to be particularly relevant to the fear of crime.
- Peoples' concerns about safety could be linked to young people i.e. groups of youths congregating together.
- One way to reduce the fear of crime is to reduce serious crime and get the message out that it is reducing across to the residents. This would be best done at a strategic level by working much closer with partnerships.
- To reduce the fear we have to improve problem areas by working together effectively (for instance by 'community clean up' projects).
- Police should bring into review licensing hours if it is a problem.

The Members all agreed that another date needed to be arranged for the Task and Finish group to meet in early August before the next meeting on 24 August 2010.

Action: Nazneen Ahmad

6 DATE OF NEXT MEETING

- The next meeting will be arranged for early August.
- Tuesday 24 August 2010, 2.00pm-5.00pm, Mezzanine Room 3 County Hall, Aylesbury.

The purpose of this meeting will be to consider the results of the questionnaire sent to members of the Safer and Stronger Bucks Partnership Board, look at best practice from other areas discuss emerging findings from the review

CHAIRMAN