

Minutes

CRIME & DISORDER JOINT SCRUTINY REVIEW

MINUTES OF THE CRIME & DISORDER JOINT SCRUTINY REVIEW HELD ON TUESDAY 3 AUGUST 2010, IN COUNCIL CHAMBER, CHILTERN DISTRICT COUNCIL, COMMENCING AT 10.05 AM AND CONCLUDING AT 12.15 PM.

MEMBERS PRESENT

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

OFFICERS PRESENT

Ms N Ahmad and Mrs C Street

1 WELCOME BY THE CHAIRMAN

The Chairman welcomed members to the meeting.

2 APOLOGIES/CHANGES IN MEMBERSHIP

Apologies were received from Paul Rogerson and Arif Hussain.

3 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

4 MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 29 JUNE 2010 AND 6 JULY 2010 TO BE AGREED

The minutes from the meeting were agreed held on 29 June 2010 and 6 July 2010 were agreed.

5 FEEDBACK FROM INTERVIEWS WITH LOCAL AREA POLICE COMMANDERS

Members reported back on their interviews with their Local Area Police Commanders. The interviews are summarised below:



INVESTOR IN PEOPLE



Meeting with Gilbert Houalla – Local Area Commander for High Wycombe, Bill Bendyshe-Brown and Paul Rogerson

- Gilbert was in the process of introducing a new regime focused on reducing fear of crime
- Anti social behaviour (ASB) was a key priority for Gilbert that was being addressed by prioritising calls and responding quickly to them.
- Although figures showed that detection rates were increasing which was very positive, a member had expressed concern about the other 80% which were not detected. Although the member acknowledged the good work of the Police in this area, he pointed out that residents would not necessarily be reassured by this percentage. In this context it would be better to show actual numbers. Gilbert explained that the 80% figure included criminal activity where the perpetrators were known but there was insufficient evidence to convict them.
- Gilbert stressed that he wanted to focus on the fear of crime but not to the detriment of tackling crime.
- Messages were sent out through Community Messaging about the arrests that have been made. There was a discussion about the fact that these kinds of messages could add to the fear of crime as they implied that the area was unsafe. To help combat this, it was important that positive messages were also used.

Meeting with Ian Hunter – Local Area Commander for Chiltern Julie Burton and John Wertheim

- Members were impressed by the effort Ian and his team were putting into reducing the fear of crime.
- He told members that people in the Chilterns area thought there was much more crime occurring than was actually happening; for instance in the Chilterns there is less than one house burglary a day.
- Ian spends a lot of time reassuring people that the rate of crime was not as high as people thought. He did this partly through attending talks with forums such as U3A, older people groups and youth groups.
- He had produced a document called 'The Realities of Crime' which contained crime rates for the area. Feedback to this from the public had been very positive.
- Communication resources in the area were an issue as, for instance, there was no local radio in Chiltern.
- Ian supported that view that members have a clear role in informing people about crime and Anti-Social Behaviour (ASB) rates in their local areas.
- There wasn't a problem with ASB caused late night congregation in the area.
- From Ian's view partnership reporting arrangements were confusing. He feels having too many reporting mechanisms results can cause lack of accountability which is made worse in a two-tier structure. Ian finds working through his Local Strategic Partnership (LSP) the most efficient way of taking work forward.

- Members were particularly impressed by the fact Ian responded directly to community safety emails from the public using his 'Have Your Say' mailbox. He also had weekly community safety meetings with Chiltern District Council (CDC).

Members discussed the fact that communication between community safety officers and members could be improved, as members were not always updated with local community safety information on a regular basis. Members also thought there was a role for Cabinet Members in passing on community safety information to other members as they linked with the relevant officers on a more frequent basis.

A member commented that Gilbert Houalla had also referred to communication problems associated with there being no local radio in the area.

The Chairman asked how well the LSPs were working generally as County Councillors are not directly involved with them. They clearly worked well for Ian in the Chilterns area and were also supported in Aylesbury by the Local Area Commander there.

Meeting with Richard List – Local Area Commander for Aylesbury Brian Roberts

- Richard believes that talking in percentages about rates of crime is not as effective as usual real numbers as these have a bigger impact on people.
- His view is that the best way to communicate is through the local papers. Richard publishes his own article in the Bucks Herald every six weeks.
- Mix 96 radio in Aylesbury allows messages to be sent out immediately if required and they have historically provided good coverage for community safety stories.
- Other media possibilities included parish magazines, and publicising positive community safety messages via the Police Community Support Officers (PCSOs) and NAG's.
- Richard's team were focussing on ASB and their PCSOs had been trained specifically to deal with ASB problems.
- Richard was keen on using the LSP to solve problems in that area. His view is that the setting and achievement of local targets is key to reducing the fear of crime.
- He is also very active within Aylesbury Vale District Council (AVDC) and is a regular attendee at their scrutiny committee.
- Richard does not see ASB caused by late night congregation and the proximity of food outlets as a problem in Aylesbury Vale.

A member commented that in Wycombe it was the location of food vans which allowed people to congregate. In Aylesbury these have been pushed out of the centre which seemed to be working well.

Members discussed the forthcoming opening of the new theatre in Aylesbury raising concerns about how worried people might be about going into the town centre at night. Richard had advised that the District Council and the Police were working together to put out positive community safety messages on billboards to help reassure people.

Meeting with Paul Cook – Local Area Commander for South Bucks

Trevor Egleton and Alan Oxley

- Crime rates were higher in South Bucks due to its proximity to Slough and the motorway. However, Paul and his team were putting a lot of work into getting the rates down and this which was proving to be successful. For instance there had been a major impact on targeting criminals from Slough and this had reduced burglaries.
- Fear of crime was exacerbated by the fact that the area received London news with 'big headline' crime stories. This was hard to combat with limited communication resources.
- Paul described how he had developed good relationships with police in Slough, the District Council and the local Community Safety Partnership Manager.
- There were not many problems in relation to extended drinking hours except for the Revolution Bar in Beaconsfield. He explained that the policing of this is very well controlled. Police are present when people are entering and leaving the bar to discourage ASB caused by late night congregation.
- The communication and management of the fear of crime was being partly addressed through the 'Have Your Say' events.
- Messages are sent out to Neighbourhood Watch members who pass these on to other people. Paul advised that South Bucks has a big Neighbourhood Watch community.
- Paul was supportive of using forums such as Neighbourhood Watch and other local resources such as parish magazines to promote positive community safety messages, as well as the warning type messages that were traditionally used.
- The Local Area Commander advised that his main was to have an impact on reducing the fear of crime rather than spending time trying to measure it.

A member suggested that there should be a 5 year rolling target for public confidence as that would show trends and would therefore be more meaningful.

A member commented that community safety messages also need to be communicated to younger people and this could possibly be done though the work of the PCSOs.

The Policy and Partnerships Officer confirmed to members that areas of good practice would be highlighted in the final report.

6 VICTIM SUPPORT - PRESENTATION

VICTIM SUPPORT – PRESENTATION - John Hayward-Cripps, Regional Manager South East, Victim Support/Witness Services

The Chairman welcomed John to the meeting and explained the purpose of the review.

John explained that Victim Support (VS) began in Bristol 30 years ago and developed into a federation of charities. In 2008 the 77 area/county VS charities merged into one large national charity with a single group of trustees. VS has 10 regions coterminous with the Government Offices. Each region has a number of Divisions; Buckinghamshire is part of the Thames Valley division. Thames Valley has approximately 40 staff and 250 volunteers.

VS supports witnesses in all criminal courts and supports victims of crime. The majority of victims are referred by the police but VS also supports victims who have not reported the crime

to the police. John explained that 80% of the funding is provided from the Ministry of Justice and 20% was from grants and fundraising. Victim support does not deal with some minor crime such as minor criminal damage or car crime: clarification was given to the effect that as ASB was not a crime VS was not funded for it. However where locally funded there are VS projects provided to support people who are victims of ASB. VS has 2 service delivery arms the Witness Service and the Victim Service.

Witness Service:

- Witness Service staff and volunteers are based in all Magistrates and Crown Courts across the UK; to support all witnesses.
- Pre-trial visits to show witnesses the Court rooms and talk through the process.
- Special measures at Court e.g., giving evidence behind screens, video link etc.
- Support for young witnesses where projects exist through home visits.

Community

- Referrals primarily from TVP - currently 40% of possible level. TVP and VS are committed to improve this and work was being done to increase this to over 85%
- VS will attempt to contact the victim 3 times by phone within 48 hours to undertake a needs assessment and to offer them support.
- A commission service budget provides funding for a wide range of practical services such as, paying for lock changes, removals, money for food if required.
- VS also runs the National Homicide Service where referrals come through the police family liaison officer.
- VS is currently rolling out a set of enhancements to the service provided including weekend working.
- Victims are offered emotional support by specially trained volunteers and are supported for as long as they need support.

Following the presentation members asked questions. The questions and answers are summarised below:

A member questioned whether the media exaggerated crime?

The media does exaggerate crime as they want to have strong stories. However everyone has a responsibility to promote positive stories.

People get a lot of calls if they report a crime, such as calls to see if they would benefit from counselling. This adds to the fear of crime and stops people from wanting to report a crime.

The Criminal Justice System can be very confusing and we are trying to make it much simpler so that victims can benefit from one point of contact. The feedback we received from victims is that they are confused by the system and struggle to find out about their case.

80% of funding received is from the government grant, has this increased?

Yes this has increased so VS can improve and enhance the services that are offered to victims and witnesses. As we now phone people directly the number of people that require our

services has increased. The services offered and provided depend on the needs of the victim. We offer to meet the victim wherever they may feel comfortable.

It would be ideal to have one point of contact that the victim could call rather than many different agencies.

We are working with the Ministry of Justice, Courts and the CPS to streamline the Criminal Justice System including having a single point of contact.

The Chairman could write to the Attorney General to support this view...

The Chairman said that this would be taken on board at the next findings meeting.

How much focus is given to victim support and how much to witness support?

Within Thames Valley there are more volunteers working within the Witness Service rather than the Victim Service although we are currently increasing the number of Victim Service volunteers through recruitment and training.

Fear of crime generally is perpetuated by media stories but what is the view of people who have actually experienced the crime, do they have a fear of crime? And does it go after they have had support?

This is a very complicated area. Initially those who experience crime want the crime to stop and the criminal to be caught. There is also research that some victims want the criminal to be punished so that they are less likely to commit an offence on another person. The fear of crime can be reduced through the support VS can provide but the fear of crime is dependant on a number of factors and is different for individual people.

The government making cutbacks, does this mean the Ministry of Justice will also have cutbacks and how sure are you that the budget will not be cut?

The Ministry of Justice is making similar cuts to other ministries. I cannot be sure that the VS budget will not be cut, I am not aware of any cuts at this time but I do not know what will happen next year.

How do you publicise the services you provide?

Over the last four months we have had a large media campaign in order to get the charity into the media this will continue and will include with details of our services. We work closely with the police to ensure victims are all aware of VS.

We have recently rebranded and have a new logo. We decided not to change our name as there was not an overriding reason to do so and it was an established name within the Criminal Justice System.

Sometimes offenders change their mind and plead guilty at the last minute, how do you support victims when this happens?

When we are aware of this we ensure the victim is made aware. One of the messages we hear regularly from victims is that they are not kept informed of progress in their case.

Would you follow this up and explain why the offender has got the sentence they have?

VS would inform the victim of the process of the Criminal Justice System and support them emotionally through the experience would include all the feelings a victim may have including anger, upset, fear, guilt etc. We do not provide therapy for people, our role is to listen, discuss and support.

You explained that you are involved in an ASB project in Buckinghamshire; can you tell us more about this?

This is funded by Buckinghamshire County Council for victims of ASB. We are providing additional training for staff and volunteers in dealing with ASB as this is not normally part of our

core work. By skilling up volunteers we will be able to support people who may be repeat victims and/or are vulnerable. This project is currently underway.

What triggers your intervention?

We receive referrals automatically from the Police but all victims can be offered our service. We also receive referrals from other organisations and self referrals as an individual does not need to have reported the crime to the police to receive a service from VS.

Do you only deal with major offences?

We do not deal with car crime or minor criminal damage unless the victim is particularly vulnerable; all other victims are eligible for our services. We will work closely with the Police in Thames Valley and have a database of other services available.

You have mentioned the Olympics in your report, do you have enough volunteers to cover this and how would you follow it up?

As a single organisation our response to major incidents is much easier to arrange as we use staff and volunteers from outside a locality to provide support when needed. We are confident that we will be able to provide support to the likely increase in victims in and around the Olympics and are increasing volunteer numbers where this is necessary.

What can Council's do to help reduce the fear of crime?

Ensuring all agencies within the Criminal Justice System put the needs of victims and witnesses high on their agenda and by arguing for victims and witnesses have a single point of contact throughout the process. Also by ensuring that positive messages relating to crime, victims and witnesses in particular are actively put into the media.

The Chairman commented on the importance of not 'scaring' people with the wrong statistics or sensationalised stories. Another member stated that numbers are better than percentages when talking about incidents. Members expressed their support for having one point of contact for victims / witnesses.

John ended the questioning session by thanking the Council Members. The Chairman thanked John for his contribution to the review.

7 REVIEW OF KEY POINTS

The members discussed who the final report from the task and finish group should be circulated to as so much information had been gathered during the course of the review. The Policy and Partnerships Officer confirmed that the report would be sent to all those that had contributed to the review.

The Chairman circulated an article recently published in The Daily Telegraph by Sara Thornton, Chief Constable of Thames Valley Police. The focus of the article was on how principles behind the Government's drive for the development of a 'Big Society' (i.e. increased volunteering and greater local devolution of power) could help bring policing closer to people and help them to feel safer. It was agreed that the article would be discussed at the next meeting of the Task and Finish Group.

Key points identified were as follows:

- The fear of crime was exacerbated by the media.
- Taking action to reduce fear of crime is more important than using valuable resources to measure it.

- The final report should include examples of best practice found during the review.

8 DATE OF NEXT MEETING

CHAIRMAN