

## **Overview and Scrutiny Joint Crime and Disorder Review - Draft Findings August 2010 – Interim Report**

### **Background**

Participating district councils and the county council in Buckinghamshire work in partnership to carry out joint overview and scrutiny reviews, taking it in turn to lead on the areas of work chosen. Topics for joint reviews are ratified by the Joint Chairmen's Network (JCN), a forum which allows the scrutiny Chairmen of all the various councils to assess and discuss possible subject areas that may be worthy of further examination by overview and scrutiny.

With the approval of the JCN, this year's review has been led by Buckinghamshire County Council, with welcome participation and keen support from Chiltern, South Bucks and Wycombe District Councils. The work was carried out by a time limited Task and Finish Group who have been meeting and gathering evidence between June – September 2010.

### **Remit of the Review**

The community safety focus of the review was chosen in recognition of new powers given to councils to scrutinise crime and disorder issues, which came into force in April 2009. The new powers came from provisions made in the Police and Justice Act 2006.

The JCN approved the original remit of the review, which was to scrutinise how members of the overarching Safer and Stronger Bucks Partnership Board in Buckinghamshire are discharging their crime and disorder functions, and to identify areas for improved partnership working.

Members subsequently agreed to use a case study approach for the second part of the review which has involved examining partnership working in the context of reducing the fear of crime in Buckinghamshire and communicating safety messages to residents.

Members chose to hone in on this area, as tackling the fear of crime is a key priority in the Safer Bucks Partnership Plan for Buckinghamshire 2010 and, as highlighted in the most recent Place Survey, although crime rates continue to fall overall in Buckinghamshire, residents still rate feeling safe in their community as a key priority. Members acknowledge that public confidence is increasing, but it is not doing so at the same level as crime rates are falling.

### **Membership**

The membership of the Task and Finish Group is as follows:

Trevor Egleton (Chairman)	Buckinghamshire County Council
Brian Roberts	Buckinghamshire County Council.
Julie Burton	Chiltern District Council
John Wertheim	Chiltern District Council
Alan Oxley	South Bucks District Council
Bill Bendyshe-Brown	Wycombe District Council
Paul Rogerson	Wycombe District Council

## **Methodology**

The review was carried out using the following methods:

- Desktop Research
- Evidence gathering meetings throughout June, July and August
- Questionnaire submitted to members of the Safer and Stronger Bucks Partnership Board
- Influencing Perception Conference – June 2010
- Research using various media articles and community newsletters.

Information has been submitted from the following partners:

- Safer and Stronger Bucks Partnership Board Members
- Bucks Fire and Rescue
- The Probation Service
- Buckinghamshire Community Safety Partnerships
- Thames Valley Police
- Victim Support – South East Region
- The Police Authority through the Local Member representative.

To ensure a balanced view, the Task and Finish Group has received community safety information from across Buckinghamshire and has conducted meetings in all district areas of the county.

## **Draft Findings and Key Areas**

Members are now at the stage where they are considering draft findings and key areas resulting from their investigations which will lead to a number of recommendations. Once these have been agreed, a report will be drafted and agreed by members at their final meeting on Monday 13 September, and will be discussed at the Joint Chairmen's Network meeting the following day. The report and recommendations will then be taken through the relevant reporting mechanisms which will include the participating council's overview and scrutiny committees and executive committees.

The draft findings and key areas resulting so far from the review are as follows:

### **Safer and Stronger Bucks Partnership Board (SSBPB)**

The SSBPB is the countywide community safety partnership for Buckinghamshire. Its membership includes representatives from the District Councils and District Community Safety Partnerships, Police, Bucks Fire and Rescue Service, Probation, Health and the Voluntary Sector.

At the Task and Finish planning meeting on 14 May 2010, members received a briefing from Susie Yapp – Acting Joint Head of Service, Localities and Safer Communities and Board member – on the workings of the Board and its governance arrangements. Susie explained the role of the Board, which broadly speaking is to ensure community safety targets contained in the Local Area Agreement (LAA) are met and that community safety priorities are agreed for the area. The Board establishes the priorities by carrying out a community safety partnership assessment. In terms of meeting targets, the Board is able to hold partners to account with regard

to their contribution to reducing crime and disorder, and is able to deploy resources to meet local priorities.

Each local district area has its own Community Safety Partnership through which local community safety concerns are raised. The Community Safety Partnerships report to the Board, which in turn reports to the Bucks Strategic Partnership (BSP). Members have learnt that the districts areas compile their own Community Safety Plans, which are refreshed annually as a result of data from the joint partnership strategic assessment. The Board also carries out an annual review of Neighbourhood Action Group (NAG) priorities.

When asked about the Board's recent key achievements, members were told how concerted efforts had brought about a significant fall in Serious Acquisitive Crime rates in Buckinghamshire. Levels are higher in South Bucks, but this is an historical situation exacerbated by its close proximity to Slough and the M40, which results in increased levels of cross-border crime.

Another welcome achievement is the introduction of a new, countywide Integrated Offender Management (IOM) project. The aim of this is to reduce re-offending in the area by partners working intensively with offenders; helping them to make lifestyle changes and making them aware of the repercussions of their behaviour.

In addition to the information provided by Susie about the operational aspects of the Board, members agreed that a questionnaire originally produced by Bracknell Forest Borough Council should be sent to Board members to find out more about the workings of the Board.

At the time of writing, a number of responses to the questionnaire were still awaited as many people were away on annual leave. An updated summary of responses will be circulated at the Task and Finish Group meeting on 24 August.

### **Areas to consider for possible recommendations**

**Board Membership** – Members questioned if there were any gaps in the membership of the Board. This seemed satisfactory other than in relation to the Judiciary. Members heard that although there were links to the Judiciary through Police Basic Command Units (BCUs), this was an area that needed to be strengthened. Members felt that it would be beneficial to have a representative from the Judiciary on the Board as the area of work it covers is so closely linked to the workings of the Board.

**Partnership Arrangements** – Members heard from the Local Area Police Commanders that the reporting arrangements they go through in relation to the partnership can be confusing. They would like the process to be streamlined so that local issues are agreed and acted on efficiently. Two of the Local Area Commanders indicated that their preferred way of working is through the Local Strategic Partnership (LSP). One Local Area Commander stated that one of the best ways of reassuring the public about crime is to set local targets and ensure local community safety concerns are responded to quickly.

**Focus of the Board** – Through the results of the questionnaire, members have heard that the Board has historically focused heavily on the 'Safer' (i.e. reducing crime rates) part of its remit and has given less attention to the 'Stronger' (i.e. fear of crime) element. Apparently, there had been plans to address this, but budget constraints and a future threat to resources is making this refocus uncertain.

## **Communications**

Throughout the review, members have heard about the importance of communications in helping to reassure members of the public about levels of criminal activity in their area. There continues to be significant disparity between people's perception of crime levels and actual crime rates. For instance, during an evidence gathering meeting with the Local Area Police Commander for Chiltern, members learnt that in that area (with approximately 90,000 residents) there is less than one house burglary per day, and less than two thefts from vehicles. When asked by the Local Commander, people living in that area assumed the figures were much higher.

Similarly, members learnt that crime figures for Aylesbury consisted of 10 – 15 crimes per week across the whole of the Aylesbury Vale area. When asked, people thought these figures were more likely to be around 100 per week. During the course of their investigations, members have discussed with partners whether it is most useful to use figures or percentages when describing activities to the public. These discussions have led members to believe that it is preferable to use actual numbers of incidents as these seem to be more meaningful and tangible for people.

The Police advised members that there is an assumption that crime is carried out by people coming into Buckinghamshire from outside of the area. Whilst this is true for a small proportion of crime, most is carried out by people who are locally born and bred, and most crime is carried out by a relatively small number of people who are persistent re-offenders.

More problematic for partners, is trying to reassure people about Anti-Social Behaviour (ASB). A member of the Task and Finish Group described his view that fear of crime may fall into two categories: fear of crime in the home, i.e. burglaries, and fear of crime in the street i.e. muggings and ASB. He proposed that whereas people can protect themselves at home to a certain extent by locking up properly etc. they expect to be 'protected' on the street and this can lead to feelings of vulnerability.

The Police reported to members that there are concerted efforts taking place throughout the County to deal with ASB. For instance, the Police have specific ASB teams assigned to deal with ASB incidents and a priority system that ensures calls are dealt with swiftly. The Police Commander for Buckinghamshire spoke to members about ASB problems that can be associated with people congregating late at night due to the proximity of food outlets to premises that have extended drinking hours. Aylesbury Vale has managed this by pushing the food outlets out of the main town area. South Bucks deals with this by carrying out 'tactical' policing, which involves having a high visibility at peak times in the evening, greeting people as they enter and leave pubs and clubs, and working closely with taxi drivers and food outlet owners during those times.

The role of the media in sensationalising criminal cases is an area that has caused a great deal of interest during the review. Members learnt of problems that are caused by the fact that areas such as Wycombe and South Bucks receive London news rather than local news. This gives residents in those communities an incorrect picture of their local area with a distorted view of criminal activity, which will inevitably be higher in a city.

Members have learnt from the Police Communications Officer that once someone is afraid of crime, they are likely to remain afraid. Overall, Police work received very favourable press but when crime occurs, it is very newsworthy and reporting is often

sensational. Tabloid readers are more fearful than broadsheet readers and as the media will continue to report about crime, it is important to provide reassurance by balancing this with good news stories featuring activities that are being carried out to tackle crime.

The Police have spoken to members about the difficulties they have had in persuading local newspapers to publish positive community safety stories. They are making headway thanks to a determined effort but it is slow progress. Mix 96 has been more supportive of reporting good news stories in the Aylesbury Vale area. The representative from Victim Support highlighted to members his view that everyone has a personal responsibility to promote positive stories, and that Councils could provide most help by helping to ensure positive community safety messages are reported in the media.

The Police Communications Officer has reported to members that where communication levels are higher (i.e. Aylesbury), public confidence is also higher. People want to know that the particular issues for their area are being tackled – and this brings about feelings of reassurance. He also informed members that Buckinghamshire has the fewest community safety communication resources in the Thames Valley area.

Members are aware from their discussions that many partners are involved with carrying out community safety activities – but their activities may not be as visible as the Police. For instance, members heard from the Director of the Probation Service who talked in detail about the Service's remit. The biggest role that Probation has in terms of reducing fear of crime is in helping to reduce re-offending rates. Probation activities include:

- Treatment packages for offenders who have substance misuse or mental health problems
- Supporting victims of domestic violence and proving them with a clear structure of how the perpetrator is being dealt with
- Providing un-paid work in the community as part of the 'making good' agenda.

### **Areas to consider for possible recommendations**

**Community Messages** - The view of most partners is that local methods are proving to be the most effective and efficient ways of communicating messages to residents. One of the methods that has proved successful for the Local Area Commander for the Chilterns area, is the production of a fact sheet which he has called 'The Realities of Crime' and which was distributed through the 'Have Your Say' mailbox. The Local Area Commander received very positive feedback directly from residents to the fact sheet. He backed up this information by responding directly to members of the public who had contacted the mailbox with community safety concerns.

Through their evidence gathering, members know that there are many good news community safety stories in Buckinghamshire – and there are very positive messages about crime rates that together could give a more realistic picture of the real scale of crime in Buckinghamshire. To help combat the negative and more sensational type of messages that are often reported in the press, it is important that these are highlighted to the public. Alongside this, the Neighbourhood Watch 'Ringmaster' system used to historically for warning messages (i.e. 'look out for red van in your area) could be used to report on success.

Media methods that could potentially be used to better effect and which were raised a number of times throughout the review are Parish magazines, Neighbourhood Watch magazines, the new county and district magazines, and information provided through the Neighbourhood Action Groups (NAGs).

The Local Area Police Commander for Wycombe advised members that reducing crime levels won't necessarily reduce the fear of crime unless you have a good communications strategy. He reported that a Communications Plan is being developed for the Wycombe area to provide a clear focus for messages. Members may wish to consider how best to support this view.



A member of the Task and Finish Group has referred to the London Borough of Hammersmith and Fulham who are putting community safety messages on highly visible sites such as lampposts. Could the use of a strapline such as 'Targeting ASB' make more of an impression on people in Buckinghamshire?

**Role of Members** – As Leaders in their local communities, members have expert knowledge about the concerns of local residents. When asked, partners felt that members could play a key role in becoming actively involved with delivering community safety messages to their local electorate. Partners have expressed the view that members would need to be appropriately briefed with key messages targeted to their local area. Member may want to consider how this could be achieved most efficiently.

One source of information that may help inform members is if they sign up to the free community messaging system which provides information to subscribers about crime and police activity in their area via phone or email. It also includes information on what the police and partners are doing to bring offenders to justice or combat anti-social behaviour. Link for reference:

<http://www.tvpcommunitymessaging.org/rmwebportal/startup.aspx>

There could also be a role for local members in lobbying the media with a view to helping to promote the inclusion of positive news stories in local newspapers such as the Bucks Free Press or Bucks Herald.

### **Victims of Crime**

During their evidence gathering meeting on 3 August, members received a presentation from the Regional Manager South East, Victim Support / Witness Service. He advised that Victim Support helps witnesses in all criminal courts and

supports victims of crime through two delivery arms. The sorts of activities the organisation carries out are as follows:

- Emotional support by specially trained volunteers
- Some practical services such as paying for locks to be changed
- Carrying out needs assessments on potential clients
- 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.

In terms of lessening the fear of crime, the Regional Manager explained that initially those who experience crime just want the crime to stop and the criminal to be caught. He referred to research which supports the view that some victims want the criminal to be punished so that they are less likely to commit an offence on another person. The view of Victim Support is that fear of crime can be reduced through the support their organisation offers, but that it is a complex area as fear of crime is dependent on a number of factors and is different for individual people.

A key point from the Regional Manager's presentation was the view from victims that the Criminal Justice System can be very confusing and they frequently struggle to find out information about their cases. Victim support is working with the Ministry of Justice, Courts and the Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) to streamline the system. Victims of crime can receive calls from a wide variety of people involved in the criminal justice process which is very disconcerting for them. Victim's Support's goal is to ensure a single point of contact is established for them. The view of Task and Finish members at their meeting was that the review should take appropriate action to support this move.

### **Areas to consider for possible recommendations**

The proposal at the Task and Finish Group meeting was that the Chairman should write to Dominic Grieve, MP for Beaconsfield, on behalf of the Task and Finish Group expressing members' support for a single access point for victims and witnesses.

### **Good Practice**

Throughout the review, members have heard of areas of good practice in terms of community safety and helping to address the fear of crime taking place across the county. A selection of these is as following:

- 'Have Your Say' events organised by the Police in high footfall areas to provide a visible, reassuring presence, and to find out what the community safety issues are for people in their local communities.
- A Victim Support project funded by Buckinghamshire County Council for victims of ASB. They are providing specially trained volunteers to support people who are repeat victims or who are particularly vulnerable.
- Partnership working between Aylesbury Vale District Council and the Police to put community safety messages on billboards outside the new theatre to reassure people that Aylesbury was a safe area to come to – at night as well as during the day.

- Community safety packs for rural areas provided by Bucks Fire and Rescue at the 2009 Buckinghamshire County Show, which included a rural risk management strategy for farmers and businesses.
- Monthly meetings with the Police and the media to help foster partnerships
- 'We asked, You said, We did' communication initiative carried out by the Police.
- Cross-border, intensive partnership working in South Bucks carried out by the Local Area Police Commander for that area and his team, which has helped lead to a reduction in crime rates.
- Community Safety Partnership banners used in Wycombe High Street to promote messages and advice.
- Community Safety Information (CSI) magazines produced by the Community Safety Partnerships.
- Use of branding to show that the Police and Councils are working together i.e. 'Working Together for a Safer Chiltern'.

### **Areas to consider for possible recommendations**

Members may wish to discuss how they can support the good practice they have discovered through the review. For instance, they may want to consider how best practice could be show-cased – is this something the Board could progress? Could Partners' websites be used for this purpose?

### **Early Conclusions**

Levels of public confidence in Buckinghamshire in terms of community safety are increasing but are not in line with overall falling crime rates. Feeling safe in their community continues to be a very high priority for residents. Fear of crime is an individual experience and hard to measure. Much work is being carried out by partners in Buckinghamshire to help reassure residents, but this is often not reflected in the media who tend to publish alarming stories about crime. This is made worse in Buckinghamshire as many of our areas receive London news, plus the Thames Valley Region is under-resourced for Communications.

Communicating clearly with the public, using numbers not statistics, is the best way to help reassure them. Use of local media is the best way of getting messages across, but members also have a role as Community Leaders in delivering community safety messages.

The Safer and Stronger Board is well structured with clearly defined priorities. There may be small adjustments needed to its focus and membership, and a need to reflect Police concerns about streamlining partnership arrangements with them.

As part of the discussion on the 24 August meeting, members will be considering an article recently published by Sarah Thornton - Chief Constable of Thames Valley Police, about Government's plans for the 'Big Society', and how the police may use



ideas behind this to help keep people safe. The final report produced about the review will need to reflect any conclusions reached from this discussion.

### **A caveat**

Members understand that the government has retracted the national indicator set and realise that partnership arrangements may need to change in light of new policy and funding constraints. For example, LAA arrangements are due to end in March 2011 and the new public sector landscape, as well as the uncertainty around how decentralisation and localism will work in practice, means that recommendations made as a result of the review are done so at a time of significant change. An example of this is the removal of the public confidence target. This means that the police will no longer have to measure performance against this target and may choose to direct their resources elsewhere.