

Neighbourhoods and Community Services Scrutiny Panel – Meeting held on Thursday, 27th February, 2014.

Present:- Councillors Minhas (Chair), Dar, M S Mann, Sohal and Wright (Vice-Chair)
Terry Conroy (Slough Federation of Tenants and Residents)

Apologies for Absence:- Councillors Dhillon, Malik, Plenty and Shah
Vivianne Royal (Customer Senate)

PART 1

42. Declarations of Interest

None received.

43. Minutes of the last meeting held on 8 January 2014

Resolved- That the minutes of the last meeting held on 8th January, 2014 be approved as a correct record.

44. Member Questions

None received.

45. The work of the Safer Slough Partnership (SSP)

The Community Safety Manager and the Chief Inspector, Slough Neighbourhood and local CID Team, introduced a report providing an overview of crime and disorder issues in Slough and the work of the local Community Safety Partnership in tackling those issues.

The Officer advised that the Safer Slough Partnership (SSP) contributed to Health and Wellbeing through the provision of high quality drug and alcohol services promoting positive behaviour change. The SSP also contributed to Safer Communities through working to ensure the borough was a safe place to live, visit, work and play.

The Officer confirmed that the Joint Strategic Needs Assessment (JSNA) highlighted crime and disorder, domestic abuse and alcohol and drug misuse as priorities, and discussed the detail of funding received from the Police and Crime Commissioner for 2013/14.

The challenges facing the SSP were outlined, and included:

- A local transient population, which made it difficult for partners to bring about long term changes in crime and antisocial behaviour and to detect crime and identify regular offenders.

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- High levels of new arrivals and asylum seekers in Slough, many of whom were at risk of exploitation.
- In terms of population density and houses of multiple occupation (HMOs): Slough had one of the highest levels of population density and over-crowded housing in England and Wales, coupled with one of the largest population increases and widening diversity; this could act as an aggravating factor with regards to crime, including burglary and violence as well as anti-social behaviour.
- Slough had a younger population when compared to other areas and there would be an increasing demand on policing and community safety.

The Officer discussed ways in which the SSP used the JSNA to identify a number of priorities and the Panel noted agreed local targets which included a 2% reduction in burglaries and violent crime. Further targets agreed with the Police and Crime Commissioner including increasing the number of gating projects in crime and ASB hotspots.

The Officer confirmed that all crime in Slough had reduced by 18% when comparing April-December 2011 and April-December 2013 statistics which was part of an overall trend of a reduction in crime of 38% between April 2003 and March 2013. The work of the SSP had focussed on its key priorities, and had included a domestic abuse audit, alley gating projects, a Street Angels support worker and a Child Sexual Abuse coordinator.

The Officer concluded that the SSP was performing well against its targets but future performance depended on continued partnership working and focussing on joint priorities across organisations, with strong leadership from Slough Borough Council.

In the ensuing debate, Members raised a number of comments/ questions as follows:

- A Member understood that some years earlier, a £0.5 million grant had been given to Slough for Crime and Disorder. What had happened to the funds and were the monies ring fenced? It was not entirely clear to which funds the Member was referring to but Avtar Maan, also in attendance, advised she would look in to this and refer back to the Member.
- Was it the case that residents were no longer reporting crime and this is why the statistics had reduced considerably. The Chief Inspector felt that the reporting mechanisms were very robust and people continued to report crimes.
- Would recent measures to tackle prostitution drive the workers underground? Members were advised that a lot of work had been done to make sure that workers were not operating on the street but it had been found that they often moved on to another location. The Chief Inspector advised that there was a lot of CCTV intelligence available to assist with the prosecution process and priority would be given to this area of crime in the coming year.

- There had been an issue with lighting in Salt Hill Park- did this remain as an issue? It was confirmed that this issue had now been resolved.
- Was there evidence of drug crime? Yes- the police worked closely with Drug and Alcohol Action Team Partners and there was good intelligence available.
- Was work being undertaken to prevent child grooming in Slough? Members were advised that the Local Safeguarding Children's Board had done a lot of work in this area and an Officer post would be created across the Berkshire area to further this work. It was confirmed that although there had been a rise in the numbers of Looked After Children and those referred to Social Services, this was thought to be as a result of parenting and neglect: none of these were related to grooming.

Resolved- That the report on Crime and Disorder and the work of the Community Safety partnership be noted.

46. Overview of Domestic Abuse in Slough

The Safer Slough Partnership (SSP) Performance and Data Collection Manager introduced a report, providing the Panel with information regarding the incidence of domestic abuse in Slough.

The Officer confirmed that reducing the risk of domestic abuse and providing support for victims was a key priority for the SSP throughout 2013/14 and 2014/15. It was noted that victims of domestic abuse were not confined to one gender or ethnic group, and this was borne out in the figures provided by the Home Office. It was also noted that Slough had significantly higher levels of reported domestic abuse when compared to other local authorities in the Thames Valley.

The Officer highlighted that reducing the harm caused by domestic abuse remained one of the key priorities and in February 2013 Slough was addressed by 'Standing Together', who promoted a coordinated, multi-agency community response to identify key activities across the Partnership and voluntary sector. It was found that overall the performance of the Partnership was considered to be poor and a number of recommendations were made to help further strengthen Slough's strategic planning and achieve improved outcomes from service providers. These included the identification of a Strategic Lead, the appointment of a full time Domestic Abuse Coordinator, (in progress) and an increase in publicity and awareness.

It was highlighted that the SSP had encouraged victims to come forward and early intervention was important. The Council had doubled its budget for domestic abuse and most front line workers now had access to training. It was important to work with NHS and GP staff to ensure that they were aware of abuse issues and that they could also access training.

The Officer concluded that Slough had comparatively high levels of domestic abuse and this was having a significant impact on local resources in Slough.

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Early indications showed that the services in place were leading to better outcomes for the protection of victims, in particular adults, and that further analysis was required to understand how the needs of children and young people could be met.

Members raised a number of questions in the debate that followed including:

- The report distinguished between 'crime' and 'non-crime'. What was the difference?
- The Officer advised that a crime was where an incident had taken place where e.g. there was a victim and a non-crime was where on the balance of probabilities the incident would amount to a crime but has not been recorded as a crime due to
 1. a) third party reports
 2. alleged victims declines to confirm
 3. alleged victim cannot be traced
 4. incident is being dealt with by another force
 5. Home Office National Crime Recording Stanrds direct a crime should not be recorded.
- Why were crimes of abuse not reported by ethnic group? It was felt that in this way communities could deal with the problem better. The Officer advised that there were data protection issues around reporting. It was confirmed by the Chief Inspector that high rates of crime would be targeted within an ethnic group if it was clear that there were particular issues prevalent.
- A Member suggested that contact be made with Mosques, Gurdwaras and Churches to highlight the problems of domestic abuse.

Resolved - That the report and Member comments be noted.

47. Interserve Performance Indicators

The Panel noted an information report provided by the Assistant Director, Housing and Environment, setting out current performance indicators for Interserve FM Ltd.

Resolved- That the information report be noted and that the item be added to the Forward Work Programme.

48. Forward Work Programme

Members noted the current work programme. Two items had been suggested for consideration by Councillor Plenty:

- Bin Collections-Customer Experience
- Water metering in Council let properties

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The Panel noted the reason for the call-ins and decided that these items did merit further scrutiny.

Resolved- That the items be added to the Work Programme for the new municipal year.

49. Date of Next Meeting - 2 April 2014

The date of the next meeting was confirmed as 2nd April, 2014.

Chair

(Note: The Meeting opened at 6.30 pm and closed at 7.55 pm)