

Neighbourhoods and Community Services Scrutiny Panel – Meeting held on Thursday, 26th February, 2015.

Present:- Councillors Plenty (Chair), N Holledge, Malik, Shah, Sidhu, Sohal and Wright

Apologies for Absence:- Councillor Mansoor

PART 1

48. Declarations of Interest

No declarations of interest were given.

49. Minutes of the last meeting held on 7th January 2015

Subject to Cllr Mansoor's declarations of interest being amended to state that they applied to Cllr Shah, the minutes of the meeting on 7th January 2015 were approved as a correct record.

50. Member Questions

No questions were submitted prior to the meeting.

51. The work of the Safer Slough Partnership

The report highlighted the current priorities of the Safer Slough Partnership (SSP) and the impact of its work. The SSP had been established given the Crime and Disorder Act 1998's requirement for community safety partnerships and emphasised information sharing and partnership working. The SSP operated as a Priority Delivery Group (PDG) with the express intent of reducing both crime and the fear of crime.

For 2014 – 15, the priorities had been established as violent crime (with specific reference to domestic abuse), acquisitive crime (burglary) and anti-social behaviour (ASB). These priorities had been decided on the basis of an annual review; the next such review would be completed at the end of March 2015 and set priorities for 2015 – 16. In the year 2014 – 15, the overall level of reported crime had decreased by 7% although violent crime had risen. However, the rise in violent crime had not been as great as it had been in comparable authorities, and the overall fall in crime from 2003 – 2014 had been 40%. This meant that Slough now had lower crime rates than Reading and Oxford, and had also recently passed Milton Keynes. The work of the SSP was co-ordinated with the Police and Crime Commissioner, with programmes and funding agreed and joint working groups established. Thames Valley Police (TVP) and the SSP would then share resources and best practice in resolving local issues, with regular meetings held to collate the latest intelligence. Community protection work had been recognised by awards, with the emphasis placed on empowering communities to have

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control of crime reduction work where appropriate. However, questions over the future funding of the SSP remained.

The Panel raised the following points in discussion:

- The statistics contained in the report are based on police figures which have been verified. However, they do not currently include any reference to the British Crime Survey. The Survey data could be compared to the SSP's statistics, although TVP were unsure as to how much the Survey data could be broken down into geographical areas. TVP did investigate any issues as to why local residents may or may not be reporting crimes.
- Oxford and Reading had been chosen as other urban areas in TVP's area. In particular, Reading also had a similar demographic which made it very comparable for other reasons.
- The careline had taken 63,000 calls from Slough residents. This was a high figure, although did include multiple calls and any accidental calls which had been made to the service. Most of those who called were elderly; however, members did request a breakdown of these calls.

(At this point, Cllr Shah attended the meeting)

- Domestic violence had risen by 9% which could be broken down on ward lines. The 2014 SSP review had examined this data as would the 2015 review. The findings of this would be fed into the working group.
- The Violence Multi-Agency Panel (VMAP) was now at the pilot stage. The final report on the pilot would be produced in July 2015.
- Domestic violence was spread across all ethnicities in a manner which did not suggest a particular issue with one demographic. In terms of tackling the overall problem, a new strategy was being developed and would be out to consultation in March 2015.
- Violent crime also featured issues regarding youths operating in groups. Work with schools was being undertaken on this matter.
- The most successful local initiatives often involved Task and Finish Groups. Other improvements had been seen in local alcohol action areas and the initial stages of the VMAP project.
- Local residents had voiced concerns that calls to the 101 non-emergency service were not followed up, which was discouraging reporting. TVP would feed this information back, as all reports should receive a call back. It was intended for the future system to allow for cases to be tracked online.

Resolved:

- 1) That members receive a breakdown of the calls received by the careline service.
- 2) That the Panel receive a report on domestic abuse statistics and the VMAP pilot in September 2015.

52. Slough Borough Council support for Neighbourhood Action Groups

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The report followed up from the information discussed by the Panel at its meeting on 4th September 2014. It contained feedback from the chairs of Neighbourhood Action Groups (NAGs) and ideas for future operations within the limited resources available, and examined this in the wider context of the Five Year Plan (FYP) and the review of policing.

The FYP emphasises community leadership and the empowerment of local residents, and an event was held on 10th February 2015 involving NAG chairs, forum chairs and Slough Councillors to discuss these themes. In particular, working patterns and community engagement; those present noted the energising effect of the presence of officers from TVP and Slough Borough Council (SBC).

The role of Councillors as community leaders could be used (in conjunction with TVP and SBC officers) to provide vital support to NAGs. This was particularly important in the context of reduced resources and the need to use them intelligently.

The Panel made the following points in discussion:

- The balance of wards which did or did not have NAGs remained unchanged since the September 2014 report. NAGs were supported by TVP whilst they were being established.

(Cllrs Malik and Sohal left the meeting at this point).

- NAGs were not necessarily the only solution to community engagement. In situations where an existing group served a similar role and was providing a good service they would continue.
- Some NAGs had started well but then faded. It was intended to restart these groups and ensure that they responded to local needs to ensure their continued momentum.
- It was vital to have a single point of contact at SBC, which would simplify matters for residents and also increase confidence that a response would be made to any queries. A dedicated telephone number and email address would be established and circulated.
- Councillors were looking to become more engaged in these efforts and would anticipate future involvement as NAGs developed.
- Local residents tended to engage with NAGs and similar groups when they had a particular issue. Communications outside of NAG meetings (e.g. SBC and TVP websites, social media) may help ensure that momentum is kept up.

(Cllr Sidhu left the meeting at this point).

- There was a community support fund; NAGs could submit applications to this for financing.

Resolved:

- That a members' Task & Finish Group is established to:

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- a) Engage with existing NAGs and community groups and assess the need for specific support on a ward by ward basis. Including sustainability of groups, options for merging groups, extending or restarting groups and whether an area is best served by a NAG or other type of community group;
- b) Assess and promote the role of NAGS and other groups in increasing community engagement, helping to delivery the council's 5YP outcomes as part of the council's and members community leadership role and the council's reducing resources;
- c) That more research into how other local authorities support NAGs and in particular examples of good practice in development of Communications strategies, support packages and whether a single point of contact for NAG and other group chairs is feasible in Slough. Together with consideration of other partnership agency reviews, i.e. TVP neighbourhood Policing; and
- d) Propose next steps and agree future expectations and performance.

53. Prostitution update

Reports on prostitution had been produced by SBC since 2011 for the Panel. In that time the situation had changed, with greater partnership working taking place. Originally the problems had been in residential areas, with these hot spots now seeing reduced levels of activity whilst the Farnham Road business area now saw higher levels of prostitution. Action on the issue took place across TVP's area, with partnership action planning and meetings of the Sex Workers' Action Group (SWAG) helping to bolster efforts to resolve the issue.

The Panel raised the following points in discussion:

- Complaints had decreased, although the movement of street activity to a less residential area could have contributed to this. However, there was evidence that some sex workers had left the area (either to return to their places of origin or to continue working in London). In addition SBC had worked on ending problematic tenancies and brothels.
- On Farnham Road, groups for workers were being organised, and TVP officers were undertaking overt and covert work.
- CCTV was being used to address the issue of kerb crawling. However, prosecutions were not the only concern for officers, with the safety and health of the workers also being tackled. Where possible, workers were also being redirected towards alternative employment.
- Kerb crawlers received letters once they had been detected soliciting. This often lead to them desisting in future, and also given the move from street work amongst sex workers this meant that very few of these cases subsequently lead to court appearances.
- Only 7 of the 15 brothels mentioned in the report were closed. Contributing factors in this included issues regarding landlords or problems with confirming the nature of the establishment with sufficient certainty to be in a position to prosecute.

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- Romanian workers were in a vulnerable position; they were being monitored given this. Photos were taken to avoid any difficulties tracking progress should false names be given in future, whilst there was also a check on their wellbeing undertaken by nurses in the outreach team.
- Public notices had been used to try and prevent street soliciting; however, its effectiveness had proved limited. It had been found that information from TVP had proved more effective in dissuading activity.

Resolved: that the Panel would take future updates on prostitution only should significant concerns arise.

54. Forward work programme

Resolved:

- 1) That an item on the amnesty for fraud cases be added to the work programme.
- 2) That an item on the safety audit recommendations for the A4 Brands Hill road works be added to the work programme.
- 3) That an item regarding the contract with SSE electricity and delays in engineering work be added to the work programme.
- 4) That clarification be sought regarding a request for private landlords to be added to the work programme.

55. Attendance record

The attendance record was noted.

56. Date of Next Meeting - 30th March 2015

Chair

(Note: The Meeting opened at 6.30 pm and closed at 8.01 pm)