

## **Neighbourhoods and Community Services Scrutiny Panel – Meeting held on Wednesday, 4th April, 2018.**

**Present:-** Councillors Plenty (Chair), Kelly (Vice-Chair), Davis, N Holledge, Parmar, Rasib and Wright

### **PART 1**

#### **50. Declarations of Interest**

Cllrs Wright and Kelly declared that one of the proposed co-opted members (agenda item 5) was a member of their party. As a result, they would not participate in any vote on the matter.

#### **51. Minutes of the last meeting held on 16th January 2018**

**Resolved:** That the minutes of the meeting held on 16<sup>th</sup> January 2018 be approved as a correct record.

#### **52. Action Progress Report**

The Panel was informed that their recommendations regarding incentivising downsizing would form part of the proposals being made to Cabinet on 16<sup>th</sup> April 2018.

**Resolved:** That the update of the progress made on actions be noted.

#### **53. Member Questions**

The use of cycle hubs was currently at a low rate; members were concerned as to whether this was proving an effective initiative, and requested a report be added to the next available agenda. In addition, the matter of the completion of LED lighting installation would be raised separately with officers.

**Resolved:** That an item on cycle hubs be added to the agenda for 25<sup>th</sup> June 2018.

#### **54. Proposed New Co-opted Members - Residents Board Panel**

The Panel were requested to approve the appointment of new co-opted members from the next meeting onwards. These would be representatives of the Residents Board Panel, but (whilst not being allowed to vote) would be allowed to attend all meetings and participate in discussions (not just on housing). The co-opted members being proposed were Trevor Pollard and Morris Sless; the Panel agreed to this unanimously.

**Resolved:** That the appointment of non-voting co-opted members representing the Residents Board Panel be approved.

## **55. Thames Valley Police Overview**

The Operating Model for Thames Valley Police (TVP) had now changed. Previously, this had involved Response Teams who were able to assist in all matters, a Criminal Investigation Department tasked with more complex cases and Neighbourhood Teams for community work. However, the Response Teams had now been reduced in size and become more specialised; Investigative Teams had increased in size and were undertaking all investigations. Overall, the establishment of officers had risen and this offered strong protection for residents.

Recruitment remained an issue, given the local issues regarding cost of living, proximity to London and other traditional themes facing Slough. As a result, there is a comprehensive programme to increase recruitment. Despite this, local performance had been good. Whilst statistics remained provisional, crime had risen by approximately 8% across TVP's area; in Slough, this was nearer 4%. In particular, residential burglaries had been reduced by approximately 7%.

The Panel raised the following points in discussion:

- Whilst detailed research on the matter had not been conducted, housing was likely to be an issue in recruitment in the south of the police force. The Wellbeing Board has identified opportunities around key worker housing but the issue was complex. Key worker housing policies were not commonplace across the region.
- Police Community Support Officers (PCSOs) had been recruited, but the shortage of career progression options for these had led to difficulties with retaining them. Maintaining numbers of PCSOs remained a priority.
- When dealing with cars parking on pavements, the level of obstruction would be assessed before deciding on the priority given to such instances. Whilst penalties did have an effect, this was often short term and also had to be undertaken in conjunction with the relevant highway authority.
- Another issue to consider regarding pavement parking was the increasing number of cars in Slough and the resultant pressure on the system. However, it was acknowledged that it could have a significant detrimental impact on residents; Neighbourhood Action Groups could indicate problem areas. In addition, Councillors were at liberty to raise with Neighbourhood Policing Teams.
- Crimes were prioritised on the basis of threat, harm, opportunities and risks.
- A 'crime against society' was defined as one where no single person could be identified as the victim. The Home Office had recently expanded this definition which had led to a rise in the number of such offences. In addition, police in Slough had prioritised drugs offences which had led to the greater number of cases detected. Slough's geographical position was also noted as a contributor to levels of organised crime.

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- The progress on residential burglaries had been, in large part, due to TVP having a high level of understanding of the local situation. Offenders were well known and were managed in order to limit re-offending, and TVP also had a positive relationship with the Metropolitan Police and other police areas on the issue.
- Whilst Police Stations were being sold, they could not easily be converted into key worker housing. In addition, the recent cuts to TVP's budget had led to a decision to make savings from its property portfolio rather than through staff cuts; this had led to TVP not experiencing the level of shrinkage many other forces had undertaken.
- TVP and Slough Borough Council (SBC) had a very good working relationship which includes working together on fly tipping. They were co-aligned with SBC's Neighbourhood Teams and undertook regular formal discussions; phone calls and emails were also exchanged on a case-by-case basis.
- TVP also worked with SBC with regards to the deployment of CCTV. This included a wide range of SBC departments (e.g. CCTV team, Neighbourhood Services, Adult Social Care) and considered all possible reasons for installing surveillance equipment. A request had to be made for the use of CCTV, and whilst it could be refused on grounds such as priority, necessity or proportionality this was not frequent. Members could be informed as to the guidelines on this (including Information Commissioner's Office guidance).

**Resolved:** That the Panel receive the guidelines for making requests for CCTV deployment.

### 56. The Prevent Strategy and Progress in Slough

Prevent was now an established part of SBC's work, with a Prevent Education Officer having been appointed in March 2018. The Office for Security and Counter-Terrorism (OSCT) was in charge of resourcing the strategy; the Panel was advised that a briefing session for all Councillors could prove beneficial for all concerned.

The Panel raised the following points in discussion:

- The main threats had been identified as Islamist and far right terrorism, with the latter having risen in recent years. However, Daesh remained active and was still the main threat. The far right was becoming an issue across Europe and the UK was not exempt from this.
- The briefing mentioned above would consist of a 45 minute introduction to the strategy and how it covered a diverse range of terrorist groups. There was a need to challenge the common perceptions of the strategy, particularly given the recent rise in far right activity whilst referrals for Islamic activity had fallen.
- Whilst there had been a couple of protests from far right groups which had not caused violence, there was no indication of local terrorist activity from these groups.

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- The Prevent Partners Group was voluntary. All faiths had been invited, and levels of involvement varied (from full participation in formal meetings to being kept informed on progress through more informal channels).
- The Home Office had supported the recent establishment of workshops for frontline staff. The OSCT had also placed more emphasis on schools recently, leading to SBC's recruitment of a Prevent Education Officer.
- Given the wide range of individuals who had been involved in terrorism, partnerships were used to map any changes in an individual's behaviour and identify key warning signs of radicalisation.
- Despite the difficulty of providing evidence for its efficacy (given that success for Prevent is a lack of terrorist activity), it had given rise to a number of success stories and improved safeguarding. In particular, individuals who had been attracted to radical groups but eventually rejected them were addressing their local communities as appropriate. There had also been a number of court cases which had demonstrated Prevent's work in intercepting terrorist activity.
- Social media had been identified as a particular area of rising activity from radical groups. Prevent would address this as appropriate.

### **Resolved:**

- a) That the Panel support a briefing session being delivered to all Councillors on the Prevent Strategy.
- b) That the Panel support the creation of a Member Prevent Engagement Group as an outcome of any such briefing.

## **57. Fly Tipping in Slough**

Both the motives behind fly tipping and the people involved in it were diverse, which led to some complexity with resolving it. However, it was a criminal offence with substantial penalties (up to 5 years in prison or £50,000 fine) and was a matter of legislation (which included the land owners where fly tipping had occurred). It was on the rise nationally, and was also being used by some as a means of making a livelihood; this had led to some groups being highly organised.

Investigations also proved lengthy and costly. One case (included in the agenda papers) had involved a year of research, and used receipts, Facebook accounts and CCTV to provide the necessary evidence. Equally, as people became more aware of their 'digital footprints' they were becoming better at avoiding these forms of detection. The issue of visibility at sites limited the efficacy of CCTV, which led to evidence capturing being difficult. The Neighbourhoods Team was working with other teams as appropriate (e.g. parks, cemeteries) on cases where the affected land was owned by SBC, but this did not stop the work being resource intensive.

The Panel raised the following points in discussion:

- SBC was not using fixed penalty notices. Whilst these were being used elsewhere, they did not remedy the problems with identifying culprit; in addition, given the £300 levied in such cases there were questions as to whether this was sufficiently severe to deter activity in anything other than the most minor cases (e.g. mattress dumping).
- It was also hard to convince witnesses to become involved. SBC did ask local residents for information, but given the fact that they could be required to testify in court should the case proceed many were unwilling to do so. This particularly applied to cases involving neighbours.
- Where appropriate, cases would be publicised to dissuade other potential fly tippers. Roving patrols on SBC estates were also used as a further disincentive.
- As operations became more sophisticated, so the methods used were more discreet. This had led to the trail going cold, as local residents did not immediately become aware that fly tipping had occurred.
- Slough's position and links to transport infrastructure had also led to it becoming more vulnerable to cross-border tipping.
- Cases of fly tipping involving large amounts of refuse were the responsibility of the Environment Agency. However, this organisation was facing resourcing issues.
- SBC was working to predict potential hotspots and deploy CCTV as appropriate. However, it was acknowledged that anticipating the potential impact of road closures could prove beneficial in limiting fly tipping.
- Environmental Services would be asked to provide information regarding the bulk waste collection service and other methods by which they could reduce the demand for fly tipping.

### **Resolved:**

- a) That the Transport Department and Neighbourhood Services share information on road closures and potential CCTV deployment to penalise fly tipping.
- b) That an item for information on the bulk waste collection service be added to the agenda for 25<sup>th</sup> June 2018.

## **58. Neighbourhood and Housing Scrutiny Overview Indicators**

The report covered quarter 3 of 2017 – 18; in future, the reporting of neighbourhoods and housing indicators would be separate. These reports would also focus on risk and areas where measures had made a positive impact. In this report, the Panel were asked to note the priority given to performance on voids and the improvement this had made. Gas safety was also a priority, and 100% compliance was necessary given the importance of the issue. On housing, the number of homelessness in temporary accommodation had risen by 18% and was now rated 'amber'. As a result, this would now be given top priority by the service.

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The Panel raised the following points in discussion:

- The trends in the rise in temporary accommodation were constantly changing and thus specific causes could be hard to isolate (e.g. new families moving to the area). At present, the definition of having 'a local connection' meant living in Slough for at least 3 out of the last 5 years. However, those who did not fall into this category SBC was under obligation to find suitable housing in the private sector.
- A draft paper on placing people in housing outside of Slough was currently being compiled. However, this would require a budget which the service did not currently hold.
- Modular homes were also an option. However, this would require resources and land and would also need to be of sufficient quality to attract residents.

**Resolved:** That the Panel endorse the proposal for Neighbourhood Services and Strategic Housing Services to present service specific reports in the new financial year.

### 59. Attendance Record

**Resolved:** That the attendance record be noted.

### 60. Date of Next Meeting - 25th June 2018

Chair

(Note: The Meeting opened at 6.30 pm and closed at 8.42 pm)