

Neighbourhoods and Community Services Scrutiny Panel – Meeting held on Tuesday, 23rd February, 2016.

Present:- Councillors Plenty (Chair), Dar, Davis, Holledge N, Malik, Mansoor, Sohal and Wright (until 8.13pm)

Apologies for Absence:- Councillor Morris

PART 1

42. Declarations of Interest

No declarations of interest were given in relation to the meeting's business.

43. Minutes of the last meeting held on 6th January 2016

Resolved: that the minutes of the meeting on 6th January 2016 be approved as an accurate record.

44. Thames Valley Police - Cyber-Enabled Crime

Thames Valley Police (TVP) addressed 3 areas specifically raised by members; the recent 'Depths of Dishonour' report, engagement with the Slough Local Safeguarding Children's Board (SLSCB) and cyber crime.

Depths of Dishonour: this report had been published by Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary (HMIC). The report was a national assessment, with each Police Force appraised as a whole. The main focus was a series of issues; female genital mutilation (FGM), forced marriage and intra-family violence (often referred to as HBV). The first 2 were recently made illegal, whilst HBV was not recognised as a distinct class of offence (unlike hate crimes). The report asked forces to self-assess on 4 areas: leadership, awareness and understanding, protection and enforcement and prevention. Members had raised the report as TVP self-assessed as 'not yet prepared' in all areas.

The assessment covered all of TVP's area; Slough was one of the more advanced areas within TVP. Officer training on issues such as indicative signs of HBV and safeguarding was taking place, with 89% of officers in Slough having undertaken this. This left Slough as the best area in Berkshire, and 3rd best in TVP, in terms of staff training. It was also recognised that HBV was an issue in Slough. As a result, policies ensuring overview, governance and leadership on the matter were in place. In addition, officers received a daily morning briefing on matters specific to Slough, with HBV cases flagged when identified before being referred as appropriate.

FGM had not yet been detected in Slough; the one report received by TVP had been provided by a third party and proved not to be FGM. However, it was recognised that the nature of the offence made affected parties less likely to report it, and health records had shown that Slough was identified as an

area with more cases than the national average. Information sharing with health services, improved intelligence gathering and increased enforcement policies were all being developed. Whilst FGM taking place in Slough had not been detected, it could not be ruled out; in all cases, taking a female abroad to undergo FGM is a criminal offence. TVP is engaged with Fiona Mactaggart MP on the issue.

Reports of forced marriage often arose when either the woman involved was about to be sent abroad, or was in a relationship with a partner who was not the one proposed by the family. It was also important to distinguish between forced and arranged marriage; whilst the first was an offence, the second was not. Cases of forced marriage would be raised in the daily briefings for officers, with a suitable safety plan constructed to protect the individual involved.

On all these matters, officer training would continue. In addition, all appointees would receive contact from the Superintendent within 2 weeks of taking their post, and these matters would be addressed as part of this.

The Panel raised the following points in discussion:

- Information on FGM was often only gathered when women were checked during pregnancy. This made it hard to deduce if the practice was being undertaken locally or abroad. However, as Slough moved towards a second generation of residents from ethnic minorities who were born in the area, opportunities for increased intelligence may arise.
- A number of forced marriages had been reported in the last year. Neighbourhood and Patrol Teams were visiting religious centres across Slough in order to understand different communities and ensure that clear communication lines were being established.
- TVP was working with Fiona Mactaggart MP on the issue. As part of this, Slough had hosted an International Women's Day event last year, and would be repeating that this year as well as hosting an International Girls' Day event.
- The training organised by TVP was specific to the responsibilities of police officers, and had been produced by specialists.
- TVP was also involved with a schools programme to deliver its message. 2 officers were involved and addressed matters such as gang violence, Prevent, knife crime and other relevant topics as well as the matters mentioned above. TVP was also committed to ensuring that activity amongst schoolchildren was intercepted and halted before it became a criminal matter.
- When children were taken abroad to undergo FGM, parents were liable to prosecution. TVP would discuss cases with the Crown Prosecution Service. It also had the power to apply for children in transit to become a ward of court and for an international arrest warrant to be issued. This would be the subject of a joint discussion with Slough Children's Services Trust following a strategy meeting. These powers had yet to be used in Slough.

Engagement with SLSCB: The 2013 Ofsted report had mentioned TVP's engagement with the Board; the Superintendent was a member of SLSCB, and TVP attendance had been 100% since this time. TVP also held the Chair on the Child Sexual Exploitation Sub-Group; a new officer was now in this post, and had been given a thorough hand over by their predecessor.

Funding for SLSCB had been established when East and West Berkshire were separate command units. However, the fact that Berkshire was home to 6 unitary authorities rather than 1 county-wide authority meant that funding was thinly spread. In 2011, a sum of £10,000 had been negotiated for SLSCB. However, this arrangement could not continue; TVP was addressing this and attempting to arrange coverage from central funds.

In terms of wider engagement, TVP was working with the new Board Chair. It had also been agreed to cut back the number of strategic groups to improve the body's focus. TVP was committed to broad and sustained engagement with SLSCB. The 2013 situation had arisen due to issues with incorporating the Board into existing workload; meetings had now been timetabled to allow TVP attendance at strategy meetings. The 2016 inspection report also highlighted TVP's use of technical language and notes which were hard to decipher; this was being addressed. TVP was also engaging in cross-agency work with the Slough Children's Services Trust to allow both parties to understand each other's work.

The Panel raised the following points in discussion:

- The Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH) was not yet established. Whilst staff from different organisations were now located in the same premises, they used separate IT and telecommunications systems and did not include all potential partners. A launch was now planned for September 2016.
- At present, Berkshire was progressing towards having 6 separate MASHs.
- Local Safeguarding Children's Boards were not funded by central Government. Their operations were being reviewed on national basis and the system may be subject to alteration.

Cyber crime: Cyber crime was experiencing a growth in activity, and could broadly be separated into 2 types: cyber-enabled and cyber-dependent. Enabled was more prevalent and the focus of the report presented to the Panel. As the population and businesses became more reliant on IT, specialist regional and national officers were dedicated to the issue. Recent incidents (e.g. Talk Talk being hacked) had demonstrated the potential widespread impact of cyber-attacks and the need for action.

The Safer Slough Partnership (SSP) was working with Cllr Matloob to organise a conference in April 2016. The anticipated outcome was the creation of a Cyber-Enabled Crime Advisory Group. This work would be innovative, as there were as yet no partnerships dedicated to developing a

shared approach to the matter. It was also intended to spread their work and message beyond Slough, which could improve its impact and also generate joint funding.

The Panel raised the following points in discussion:

- Given the presence of technology companies in Slough, the focus on cyber crime was understandable. However, the remote operation of such crime did lead to a national aspect in challenging offenders. Despite this, a local focus was also required to improve user knowledge (e.g. cyber bullying and using social media). Slough-specific groups were co-ordinating their actions with those of national bodies.
- The exact local picture was hard to deduce as data on cyber crime was held at national level. However, the indications were that Slough did have a rate of cyber crime which was above the national average. Trading Standards were also active on the issue of fraud and were currently compiling a picture based on available information.

In addition, the Panel raised the following points on policing in general:

- Cameras could be used to enforce yellow box junctions; however, the funds they raised reduced as knowledge of their existence spread which limited their financial viability. Joint operations with Reading or the procurement of mobile cameras offered alternatives, whilst the Safer Road Partnership could provide local intelligence. Officer capability would remain limited whichever options were selected.
- There was no Speed Watch scheme in Slough. Traditionally these were established by Neighbourhood Action Groups but other means (e.g. Parish Councils) could be used.

Resolved: that the report be noted.

45. Enforcement of Littering, Fly Tipping and Enviro-Crime

The Resilience and Enforcement Team had been established in January 2015. It focused on joint operations such as Community Protection Notice warning letters. The team worked in co-operation with Police and the Home Office as applicable and also acted upon other issues highlighted by Trading Standards as they emerged. The Rogue Landlord project was also in operation and would employ new software to aid its work.

The Panel raised the following issues in discussion:

- Slough Borough Council (SBC) had the power to obtain entry warrants and could also discover additional matters when using them. It was often the case that one form of criminal behaviour was indicative of the presence of others and these would be pursued when found. SBC officers would be accompanied by police when undertaking an entry warrant, alongside other officials (e.g. Home Office, Department of Work and Pensions) as appropriate.

- The team included 9 officers, although they were not solely dedicated to enviro-crime.
- Should any issues regarding potential deportation arise as a result of enquiries, this would be a decision made by the Home Office not SBC.
- SBC was not legally obliged to rehouse evicted tenants in SBC housing stock. SBC may be under obligation to seek alternative accommodation or it may not depending on the circumstances involved.
- A new Housing Act was being considered by Government; this may provide local authorities with greater authority to enforce housing standards. Although the precise details were not yet clear, SBC anticipated significant changes from any such legislation, and was supportive of being given new powers although was also aware that they could be onerous.
- It was a criminal act to threaten tenants with eviction for reporting concerns about their landlord. However, it was also accepted that in such cases, should a landlord state that they were selling the property it could be hard to prove malicious intent. SBC would track the behaviour of landlords in such cases (e.g. was due notice provided through an appropriate form) and assessing patterns; where landlords owned several properties, research would be conducted as to whether similar behaviours were visible in separate incidents. SBC officers were also being trained in how to take statements from local residents which could be presented in any court cases.
- Any individuals hiring skips which they then allowed other residents to use for a fee were committing a criminal offence.

Resolved: that the report be noted.

46. Littering Enforcement Project

The pilot had failed to be self-financing but had provided successes in terms of environmental improvement. The Panel was being asked to indicate if it supported a 6 month extension of the pilot or its termination.

Phase 1 of the project involved patrols (mainly on Slough High Street) and the sharing of penalties paid between SBC and the contractor. Phase 2 (should it proceed) would see the contractor take full ownership of the process from beginning to end. However, the number of fines received had reduced as Phase 1 of the project progressed which led to its failure to self-finance. The reduction in littering may have resulted from awareness or the shorter days of winter.

(At this point, Cllr Wright left the meeting).

The Panel raised the following points in discussion:

- All fines received had been for littering. They could be issued for refusal to pick up dog faeces, but when the public saw an officer they were extremely loathe to ignore their responsibilities on this matter.

- The team had consulted with the Legal Department. In cases where the matter progressed to court, SBC would win the vast majority but the costs involved and the problems in recovering them made such an approach unviable.
- SBC dealt with any appeals and complaints arising from the Project. Should there be fair cause (e.g. mental health issues) then the prosecution would be terminated.
- SBC could only 'name and shame' offenders if they did not pay the fine.
- SBC could not guarantee that the project would become self-financing.
- The majority of tickets had been issued for offences on Slough High Street. Notices had also been handed out in Langley and on Farnham Road.
- The Department for Communities and Local Government has stated that the UK has a level of littering which is amongst the worst in the European Union. No precise analysis of the environmental benefits of the project could be provided; any detailed investigation into litter levels on Slough High Street would be labour intensive. However, some preliminary investigations could be conducted. The Panel signalled their desire to see some research into the environmental benefits of the pilot undertaken.

Resolved: that the Neighbourhoods and Community Services Scrutiny Panel support the extension of the pilot in to Phase 2 for a further 6 months from 1st April 2016 by a majority vote.

47. Five Year Plan - Outcome 4

Outcome 4 of the 5 Year Plan fell under the theme of 'Enabling and Preventing'. In this context, that involved communities being enabled to take ownership of their protection and prevent problems becoming real dangers. At present, Slough had lower per capita crime rates than Reading, Oxford and Milton Keynes.

Outcome 4 also had close co-dependencies with other 5 Year Plan outcomes such as 2 (housing), 3 (town centre regeneration) and 7 (maximising income). The outcome had also been recently amended as part of the review into the 5 Year Plan, with the promotion of Slough as a positive and safe place added as a key action.

The Panel raised the following points in discussion:

- The estimates which led to Slough being rated safer than Reading, Oxford and Milton Keynes were based on police crime data. They did not use the National Crime Survey beyond its consideration as an indicator of local perceptions.
- The Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead had lower overall crime rates, although Windsor's night time economy led to it having higher levels of violent crime.

- Slough had experienced a slight rise in levels of violent crime. However, national averages had risen at a higher rate than Slough, whilst it should be noted that more categories were now recorded as violent crime. The Violence Multi-Agency Panel (discussed with the Panel in October 2015) focused on this issue, and violent crime involving alcohol was a particular local concern.
- The Outcome Highlight Report was being amended as information was compiled. This included the assessment of the information which was held by SBC, that which was not and the knowledge needed to bridge any gaps.
- Officers were aware of the issue of under reporting of crime and was not purely driven by official statistics.

Resolved: that the Panel request that the use of the National Crime Survey in analysis of crime levels be investigated.

48. Forward Work Programme

Resolved: that the forward work programme be noted.

49. Member Questions

The Panel made the following comments in regards to the responses received:

Question 1 (allotments): members were dissatisfied with progress made given the undertaking for action on unlet plots by February 2016. More information on the matter would be sought.

Question 4 (yellow box junctions): given the information provided by TVP under minute 44, SBC would be contacted. This would relate to potential co-operation with TVP and may return to the Panel as an agenda item as appropriate.

Question 6 (housing): this response was outstanding and would be chased up.

50. Attendance Record

Resolved: that the attendance record be noted.

51. Date of Next Meeting - 29th March 2016

Chair

(Note: The Meeting opened at 6.34 pm and closed at 9.11 pm)