

NORTHAMPTON BOROUGH COUNCIL

**SCRUTINY PANEL 1 SERIOUS ACQUISITIVE CRIME AND VIOLENT CRIME/
COMMUNITY SAFETY**

Monday, 26 November 2012

COUNCILLORS PRESENT: Councillor Danielle Stone (Chair); Councillors Mick Ford, Brendan Glynane and Brian Sargeant

CO-OPTED MEMBERS: Sharon Henley Crime Prevention Design Advisor
Community Team
Northamptonshire Police
Neil Bartholomey Chair Northampton Pub Watch

WITNESSES: Laura Major Northamptonshire Police
Denise Meylan Northamptonshire Probation
Lucy Westley Sunflower Centre
Hassan Shah Northamptonshire Pakinstani
Welfare Trust

OFFICERS: Debbie Ferguson Safer Stronger Partnership
Manager
Will Finn Community Safety Data Analyst
Tracy Tiff Scrutiny Officer
Joanne Birkin Democratic Services Officer

1. APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence from the meeting were received from Councillors Christopher Malpas, David Palethorpe and Chief Inspector Max Williams.

2. MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on 10th October 2012 were approved and signed by the Chairman.

3. DEPUTATIONS / PUBLIC ADDRESSES

There were none.

4. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST (INCLUDING WHIPPING)

There were none.

5. WITNESS EVIDENCE

(A) NORTHANTS POLICE

Laura Major, Acting Deputy Head of Community Safety (substantive post Crime Prevention Manager) attended the Panel to discuss responses to the core questions.

Written responses had already been submitted from other departments within Northants Police. The main points of discussion were as follows:-

Serious Acquisitive Crime

Across the commands of the police, there are different departments addressing different aspects to tackle Serious Acquisitive Crime, including Local Policing teams, the Crime Prevention team within community safety and the Crime Support department.

The main functions of the Crime Support department are:-

- Intelligence Function
- Burglary and Autocrime Teams- two sites
- Integrated Offender Management (IOM)

The prevention of SAC through detection of crime and reducing reoffending is within the remit of the IOM.

Wider preventative strategies sit within District Safer Community Teams and the Community Safety Department, with the Crime Prevention Officers, and Crime Prevention Design Advisors (CPDA). The role of the CPDA is to 'design out crime' at the planning stage in new and regenerated developments.

The District Chief Inspector and Police Crime Prevention Manager attend the Community Safety Partnership (CSP) and take part in identifying priority locations and then target resources accordingly. The police have an analyst team which identify crime patterns and seasonal peaks. Both local policing teams and Crime Prevention Officers work alongside NBC on areas identified for partnership work and prevention of crime.

Under Operation Guardian there are High Impact Days targeting specific SAC crime (burglary/vehicle crime/robbery), these are undertaken on particular areas, and include enforcement activity around offenders as well as prevention and community engagement.

IOM works closely with the probation services to assess offender's needs and potential pathways out of offending as well as enforcement.

There is good engagement with the Council but there needs to be further high level engagement around policies. For example, it is not understood how housing and maintenance prioritise upgrades and continued maintenance programmes and whether these are in line with the priorities set within the CSP. It would also be useful to have more engagement prior to planning application determinations, at the pre application stage.

There have been challenges as both partner organisations have undertaken structure changes, which do highlight gaps. There needs to be work done on how to fill the gap previously covered by Neighbourhood Coordinators.

In addition the police have started an intensive engagement project, with 4 projects Countywide. The Northampton project is looking at community engagement with a view to

improving SAC levels. This work has highlighted a gap with no clear partnership forum available to set community identified prioritised, and to work with partners (including the community) on the necessary solutions.

Reduction of re-offending in Northampton could be helped if it featured as a Borough priority in support of the Community Safety Strategy.

Violence

A written submission has been provided in relation to Operation Challenge, focusing on violent crime.

The Crime Prevention Officers, undertake home surveys of high risk victims of Domestic Abuse and utilise funding as and when available to implement safety measures in the home. In addition to 'target hardening', where the risk is raised further, the installation of Sanctuary's (a safe room) is undertaken. Clarity regarding funding is required.

Last years County Schools Challenge delivered the "One Punch" campaign anti-violence messages, this years County Schools Challenge is focused on the Sophie Lancaster Foundation and will engage the County's secondary schools.

Police Community Safety has reviewed and restructure of Operation Nightsafe, the Force operational response to the policing of the local night time economy.

A "consequences workshop" is being trialled elsewhere in the County, where youngsters who have been convicted off ABH or Common Assault are faced with the consequences of their actions. It is hoped this programme will be rolled out across Northampton.

A key factor to success is information sharing to identify potential key violence triggers.

In response to questions relating to the Community Engagement work.

- There has been some specific work done in certain areas of the County. The South West sectors focus has been on community engagement, with a very intensive canvas of local areas designed to identify community priorities and build upon community assets. In other areas the topics of focus have been Confidence in the Police, Anti-Social Behaviour perception and Violence. The University is engaged with the project, and it is thought an evaluation of each project (what worked, what didn't) will be completed.

Additional Questions:

- There is a need to reduce the impact of the "broken window syndrome" on member of the community; such issues are identified raised through Environmental Audits produced by Crime Prevention Officers for the use of the CSP. Members asked how the Police liaison with the Borough Council could be improved in this area. This is currently done between local policing teams and local wardens. One possible

improvement could be being able to provide an enhanced maintenance service in hotspot areas.

Members of the Panel thanked Laura Major for her response to its core questions.

(B) NORTHANTS PROBATION

Denise Meylan, the Director of Offender Management at Northants Probation attended the meeting to answer the core questions.

The main points were as follows:-

Northants Probation has the overall responsibility for supervising over 3,200 offenders across Northamptonshire, of which approximately 2,300 are in the community.

The fundamental aims of the service are to offer public protection and to reduce the level of re offending by promoting full rehabilitation; they are also involved in the enforcement of community orders as set by Courts and licence requirements for prisoners released from custody.

Serious Acquisitive Crime

Question 1

The starting point is to do a full assessment, using a tool called OASys, this is very effective in profiling the offender and making evaluations The assessment informs the involvement with internal teams and external agencies such as the Police and Drugs and Alcohol teams.

Question2

Prevention of crime is not a statutory requirement of the Probation Service although obviously they work with the Police and will often be able to flag whether an offender is at risk of reoffending.

Question 3

One of the significant issues is that of finding suitable accommodation. It could be a significant problem if those offenders who are most violent cannot be housed as this could put the public at significant risk. Suitable accommodation also assists the chances of those offenders being able to find stable employment and become part of a community. There are also some families where persistent offender behaviour is now being repeated through different generations- this is being tackled through the 'troubled families' initiative.

Question 4

Within NPT , we have dedicated professional and qualified staff who have the key responsibility for discharging offence focused work with offenders and ensuring that requirements of court orders and licences are met. Some of our work is supported by the Reach Project which takes key groups of offenders and the core remit is to assist them in securing training and employment. With police colleagues we also have a team, named Integrated Offender Management (IOM) which seeks to address violent and acquisitive crime with mainly male offenders. The typical age range is 18-30 and many are alcohol and/or drug dependent.

It is also important to maximise information sharing and make sure that all relevant agencies are given information in a timely way.

Question 5

The Police are the organisation most responsible for reducing serious acquisitive crime however the Probation Service are committed to reducing re offending rates.

Question 6

The Police Crime Commissioner should provide a strategic overview. They should also have a good understanding of local issues, hotspots and crime profiling. They need to have regular quality briefings with key partners.

She also felt that if agencies are given funding then they should be required to account for the money spent and be clearer about outcomes to fit and meet local priorities.

Violent Crime

With specific regard to violent crime, the Probation Service runs an integrated domestic violence programme. This is a programme of 18 month duration. with a specific court requirement.

There are Multi Agency (MAPPPA) meetings which are held regularly. Meetings are held weekly for level 2 offenders and monthly for the small number of level 3(more serious) offenders.

There is a very close relationship with the Police and there is a connection into BUDDI which is a real time satellite system tracking offenders. There is also a strong connection with the prison service on the releases and resettlement of offenders.

Members asked how Northampton Borough Council could further support the service.

There was some discussion on how “payment by results” might be effective and it was considered that targets would have to be set locally .The University could be approached to see if there was any research capacity.

Housing remains a major issue, pressure is growing on Council accommodation and the Probation Service has found it harder to find accommodation, particularly for the most violent offenders. They do have one hostel with 22 places. The Local Authority Chief

Executives Group is working to try and coordinate housing protocols throughout the County. The one currently used by South Northants is very good.

There are frustrations with enforcement; people perceive that the majority of resources are concentrated on a minority. The service will always consider issues on a case by case basis, where there are serious protection issues then custody will be preferred as a punishment method.

There may be issues for the service if financial support is withdrawn from support groups etc. and currently the service would not be consulted when funding issues were discussed. For example the service has made a commissioning offer with the (SWAN) group, which may now find itself unable to continue because of lack of funding.

There was also discussion about whether data protection issues had an adverse effect on organisations being willing to provide placements for offenders. There are several issues and it always needs to be considered whether there the placements are suitable as this will vary on a case by case basis assurance was given that all offenders on 'community pay back' are properly screened and any concerns are welcomed.

Members questioned whether there were benefits from having offenders and victims take place in any kind of meeting this is commonly known as Restorative Justice. This must be done carefully in order to make sure that the victim is not revictimised, but it may be a positive step towards the offender being re-integrated back into their community, which is very important in terms of reducing the chances of reoffending.

Members of the Panel thanked Denise Meylan for her very comprehensive and informative response to its core questions.

(C) HASSAN SHAH- NORTHAMPTON PAKISTANI WELFARE TRUST

Hassan Shah from the Pakistani Welfare Trust attended the Panel to discuss answers to the key questions.

The main points of the discussion were as follows:-

The Asian gold thefts were an example where the local community had been instrumental in getting action taken to resolve a problem. The gold thefts were targeting the Asian community as it was known that they kept high value jewellery in their homes. Initially however the Police did not consider that the statistics highlighted that there was a problem. Ultimately there was a good community response and the Police did identify patterns relating to the thefts which did indicate specific targeting. There was a wide spread publicity campaign involving the targeted communities and full investigations leading to some prosecutions.

It was pointed out that currently there were no checks if people went to sell gold, which makes it an easy commodity to dispose of.

Another area of concern was that of violence to taxi drivers. This often started as fare dodging, but had on occasion ended up in a case of serious assault.

As a good number of the Pakistani/Bangladeshi/Muslim community are taxi drivers if they feel that when they are victims of crime not much is done, then this colours the view held of the Police/ Council/ other authorities by the wider Pakistani/Bangladeshi/Muslim communities thereby having a disproportionate effect on the community, if the community feels that appropriate action is not being taken.

There was also a feeling that drivers were being persecuted as there were consultations going on about making the condition policy stricter. Drivers felt that this was an unfair burden at a time when it was hard to make a living. It was emphasised that this was related to work being done on making taxis safer. He also considered that some of the enforcement action undertaken whereby officers flag down private hires vehicles was unfair. If they are caught then it is directly taken to prosecution, leading to fines and at least temporary suspension of a licence. However officers stated that there was now a course which the driver could attend giving an option of avoiding prosecution.

Mr Shah raised installation of CCTV in taxis. This had been looked into in the past, but because of the number of taxis involved it would prove too expensive. He considered that it could be introduced in a small number of vehicles as a pilot.

He felt that the most important issue was for the Police and Council to build trust and confidence with the Pakistani/ Muslim community. Unless that was done then if the perpetrator of crime came from within that community e.g honour based violence, the Police/Council would need to engage with the community but would find it difficult to do so.

Members of the Panel thanked Mr Shah for his attendance.

(D) SUNFLOWER CENTRE

Lucy Westley from the Sunflower Centre gave the Panel responding to the key questions.

The main points of the discussion were as follows:-

The Centre is run for the victims of domestic abuse so she was answering the questions from the violent crime viewpoint only.

She considered that the whole issue of domestic violence was so vast that it could be considered as a separate Scrutiny Review.

Last year there were more than 12,000 reported incidents of domestic abuse in Northamptonshire, 4,997 of which were from the Northampton Borough area. In the first quarter of this year 49% of all of the centre referrals are from the Northampton Borough area. Whilst there are no statistics available locally yet on the impact of the service on repeat victimisation, national statistics provided by CAADA show that in 57% of cases there is no further abuse or violence after intervention.

The Sunflower Centre is an independent domestic violence advisory service. It is a very victim focussed service providing safety advice and support including signposting to housing, criminal and civil matters and support through court. We are strongly linked to the Multi agency risk assessment conferences providing the victim's voice and wishes.

Referrals come largely from the Police (approximately 60%). The service is hosted by Northamptonshire Police therefore all information regarding risk is all directly available to the Police on their systems.

The Centre does a large amount of multi-agency liaison work including with prisoner release, awareness training with other agencies, and education through schools, encouraging reporting and community involvement.

Housing is also an issue for the Centre; it does not have any accommodation itself, but has found in the last year that it is harder to get accommodation both through refuge and housing because of cuts to service. Lucy questioned why the emphasis was on moving the victim out of the family home when they should be looking to move the offender and where possible making the victim safer in their own home as this can be more cost effective. Lucy advised as refuge was cut the pressure on target hardening and civil orders will be greater and these are also facing pressure.

There are often cases involving complex needs such as mental health/ substance misuse where there are multi agency problems and it is difficult to agree who will take the lead. These can be the most difficult cases.

Being in employment may also be a barrier to getting assistance and the victim may not be able to obtain legal aid or to pay for refuge.

There has been an on-going pilot of a Specialist Domestic Abuse Court over the last 5 months regarding getting domestic violence cases into the court system. However, because of the amount of time that it takes to get a case to trial many victims withdraw because of pressures from the offender. Initial hearings progress quickly but follow up trials are a much longer timeframe.

There are a few people who are serial offenders and they move from victim to victim.

The Centre also does work on support for women whose partners are undertaking IDAP with the probation service providing information and reporting breaches.

Suggestions on how NBC can improve their services to victims of domestic abuse and support our service/victims are:-

- A review of housing responses and consideration of perpetrator clauses, ongoing use of target hardening and civil orders.
- Improved communication with our service and other Domestic abuse services
- Consider funding for prevention as well as reaction.
- Support the continuation of the Specialist Domestic Violence Court.
- There is a need to be honest with clients about what can be done. Only realistic options need to be presented and these will differ for each person.

- There is a need to be an understanding and patience that it may take a client some time before they are ready to take certain steps, such as leaving the offender.

There are certain factors that do contribute to the likelihood of violence being committed and in many cases alcohol places a contributory factor. This is not just a case of people drinking in pubs but increasingly frequently drinking at home or drinking at home before going into town.

The work of Operation Challenge scheme had a positive impact on domestic incidents- in particular, the pilot undertaken in the town centre in Northampton.

Countywide approximately 25-40% of cases are repeat, in that they involve the same perpetrator and victim.

In certain parts of the County, such as Corby and Kettering, there are prevention programmes being carried out for perpetrators of domestic abuse. These are undertaking more in depth behaviour analysis, and the results are being examined with a view to rolling that programme out to other parts of the County.

The Community Safety Partnership will also be piloting working with Women's Aid on lower level intervention. This is due to start in the next month.

Funding for the Centre comes from a number of different sources and it was emphasised that should there be cuts in funding then there would be a reduction in the amount of work the centre could carry out.

In response to a question regarding staff training in general it was felt that the Council staff were generally very good and supportive, but that there was always room for more awareness. It was confirmed that there will soon be some training undertaken for all Community Safety Partnership members who work on the frontline.

It was also suggested that there should be some awareness training made available for Councillors. This has already been offered and undertaken in Corby and Kettering.

There have been changes that have been beneficial, for example expanding the definition of domestic abused to include Coercive control. The age range is also being widened to include 16-18 year olds. Also in some cases restraining orders are attached to certain offences which mean that these apply when an offender is released and a victim does not then have to go through an application process.

The Panel thanked Lucy Westley for her very informative presentation.

6. NEIGHBOURHOOD WARDENS

The Panel received a written response on the core questions from the Neighbourhood Wardens.

Previously there had been some concern that with the loss of the Neighbourhood coordinators, there would be more expected of the Neighbourhood Wardens and members

wanted to be sure that there would be sufficient training and support offered to enable to fulfil that role. Members still felt that they wished to be able to ask that question directly.

AGREED: That the supervisor of the Neighbourhood Wardens be invited to attend the next meeting of the Panel.

7. BRIEFING NOTE-SITE VISIT TO SPENCER WARD

The Panel considered a briefing note on the site visit to Spencer and Kings Heath.

The main points of discussion were as follows:

It was thought that there had now been planning applications made on both of the pub sites.

Members felt that were there were “hotspots” where there were identified requirements that may help to prevent further deterioration that there should be some system of being able to provide a quicker response.

AGREED:

1. That the information gathered from the site visit to Spencer and Kings Heath Wards be used to inform the Panel’s evidence base.
2. That the Chair of the Panel contacts Planning Services to ascertain the status of the Morris Man and Silver Cornet sites.
3. There is a need for all service areas involved in community safety to attend meetings of the Community Safety Partnership.

The meeting concluded at 8:45 pm