

NORTHAMPTON BOROUGH COUNCIL
MINUTES OF SCRUTINY PANEL 1- HATE CRIME

Thursday, 19 January 2012

COUNCILLORS PRESENT:	Councillor Danielle Stone in the Chair , Councillor Beverley Mennell	
Witnesses	Ruth Austen	Senior Environmental Health Officer
	Darren Berwick	Housing Services Team Leader
	Kerrie Chennel	Senior Housing Officer
	Ian Tyrer	Revenue and Benefits Officer
Officers	Debbie Ferguson	Safer Stronger Partnership Manager
	Bill Edwards	Neighbourhoods, Licensing and Support Team Leader
	Tracy Tiff	Overview and Scrutiny Officer
	Joanne Birkin	Democratic Services Officer

1. APOLOGIES

An apology for absence from the meeting was received from Councillor Tony Ansell.

In the absences of the Chairman Councillor Danielle Stone was elected Chairman for the meeting.

2. DEPUTATIONS/ PUBLIC ADDRESSES

There were none.

3. MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on 28 November 2011 were approved and signed by the Chair.

4. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST (INCLUDING WHIPPING)

There were none.

(A) AWARENESS TRAINING - REPORTING OF HATE CRIME

The Scrutiny Panel received evidence from Officers regarding the Council's standard awareness training on Hate Crime.

The main points of the discussion were as follows: -

- Officers felt that the training was very informative. It was useful to be able to discuss cases and share other people's interpretation of whether an incident could potentially be a hate crime.

- It would be useful to have refresher training or some other method of keeping hate crime in the forefront of officer's minds.
- Bill Edwards had visited Environmental Health Team meetings to refresh the message.
- Officers felt that the training had help to raise awareness of some of the different strands of hate crime.
- They all felt that the on line reporting system was much easier to use than the previous system and that this should encourage reporting. It was also an improvement that this was now a corporate policy whereby previously services had their own policies.
- It was felt that the training served as a useful reminder of the impact that the hate crime had on the customer.
- Concern was expressed that there needed to be other ways of reporting, not just online. It was confirmed that if a customer raised an incident with officers then officers would complete the reporting form. Alternative access and information points were being considered.
- It is important for the customer to be informed as to what is happening with their case and they have a point of contact through the reporting officer.
- Accurate reporting was needed in order to identify any "hot spots" or areas of concern either in terms of location or the types of incidents occurring. This would be vital in concentration of resources or in developing preventative measures.
- The Panel were advised that there is a mapping system, which could be used to build up a picture of incidents and identify patterns. They were advised that when an ASBO is declared then a Councillor should be informed and there is information on that.
- Information relating to ongoing incidents could not contain details of individual victims or witnesses but could summarise locations and types of incidents. It was considered that this would be useful supporting information in an Annual Report.
- The Panel were advised that the Housing department then all reported incidents are sent a questionnaire when the investigations were closed asking customers what they felt about the investigation process. Currently not many of these are returned. In future they were looking at contacting non-responders by phone by another team.
- It is more likely that the questionnaires would be completed by people who were dissatisfied, not necessarily by the process, but by the outcome.

AGREED: - That the information on ASBO's be sent to all Councillors and a recommendation in the report be that incident information is made available as part of the Annual Report.

(B) AWARENESS TRAINING

The Scrutiny Panel had received the Council's standard awareness training on Hate Crime prior to the meeting and made the following points:-

Members felt that training was very good. They felt that it covered the different types of hate crime.

AGREED :- That a recommendation should be included in the report that it would be beneficial if all Councillors should have the awareness training.

6. INFORMATION OBTAINED FROM HARD TO REACH GROUPS

The Panel considered the responses to the Panel's core questions.

- (a) Responses: - Mencap – East Region
- (b) Northampton Disabled Peoples Forums
- (c) Northampton Diverse Communities Forum
- (d) Traveller Liaison Group

The main points of the discussion were as follows: -

- The response from Mencap- East Region was attached to the agenda.
- The minutes of the forums were tabled at the meeting and are attached to the minutes for information
- The Chair and Councillor Mennell visited the Traveller Liaison Group. The main points of that discussion were: -
- The Group were very negative and did not feel that they wanted to get involved in formal reporting processes but wanted to deal with it in their own way.
- There was some resentment that due to a reorganisation the housing estates officer that had been their liaison was being moved to another area. Members expressed concern that vulnerable people needed to be able to have consistency.
- The Group came across as independent and there was a feeling that they would not willingly participate in any reporting awareness training, and that it was unlikely that they would participate in any mediation, although the current estate officer would appear to act in that role.

- They had suffered from incidents were taxi drivers had refused to take women and children back to the site. It was commented that this might be because taxi drivers had previously had problems on the site and would not enter the site. It was pointed out that that was not necessarily because they were gypsies but and that there had been other areas where drivers would not go.
- It was agreed that the Licensing team could be asked to look into the matter, as it was felt that it was important that the Travellers should feel that there was some element of progress when they reported a problem.

7. WITNESS EVIDENCE - LEADER OF THE COUNCIL

The Leader of the Council addressed the Panel on their core questions. The main points of discussion were as follows: -

- Reporting mechanisms are now widely available on the Intranet/ Internet.
- There is a corporate policy and reporting mechanism. There has been extensive training of staff reminding them of their duty and obligation to report hate crime incidents. Keeping the Item on team meetings would continue to keep the matter in the forefront for officers.
- Barriers to reporting the incident may be related to lack of awareness, which is being tackled through the staff training and the emphasis that the culture of the Borough Council will not tolerate, hate crimes.
- Suggestions for the Overview and Scrutiny to Champion include: -
- Encouraging regular reminders/updates to staff.
- Asking Councillors to get involved in raising the profile of hate crime reporting within their own areas.
- Encourage Councillors to undergo Hate Crime awareness training
- The Leader considered that an annual report would be a good idea.
- Involving partners and use resources more effectively.
- It would also be useful to share best practice.
- There ahs been a significant amount of progress in a fairly short time and it would be useful if that could be shared.

AGREED 1. That one of the Review recommendations be to ask the Leader to approach partners regarding the most effective way of ensuring hate crime reporting across agencies.

2. In a years time a case study be prepared on the process and effectiveness of the changes that have been made to Hate Crime reporting.

8. EXAMPLES OF BEST PRACTICE EXTERNAL TO NORTHAMPTON

The Panel considered a report detailing some examples of best practice.

The main points of the discussion were as follows: -

- Members queried whether it would be possible to bid for any special funding for dedicated resources. In such cases there were problems of sustainability as withdrawing funding can leave a service without any back up resources.
- There were discussions over third party reporting, which may be used more out in communities for example using information stands or reporting points.

AGREED That the evidence from the desktop research be used to inform the Review.

The meeting concluded at 7:10 pm