



NORTHAMPTON BOROUGH COUNCIL

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY

SCRUTINY PANEL 1 – SERIOUS ACQUISTIVE CRIME, VIOLENT CRIME AND COMMUNITY SAFETY

10TH OCTOBER 2012

BRIEFING NOTE: SITE VISIT – SPRING BOROUGHHS AND BELLINGE

1 Introduction

- 1.1 At the meeting of the Panel on 18th June 2012, it was agreed that two site visits take place. One to a locality where there were currently problems with serious acquisitive crime (SAC) and one where improvement work had been carried out. The purpose of the visits was to concentrate on “hotspots” and focus on environmental improvements. Two site visits were therefore set up.
- 1.2 A visit to Spring Boroughs and Bellinge took place on Monday 13th August 2012 and a further site visit to Spencer ward is scheduled for Monday 8th October 2012. Details of the latter site visit will be provided to the next meeting of the Panel.
- 1.3 The site visits were led by Sharon Henley, co optee, due to her knowledge of the areas as she had been involved in the improvement works when they were carried out in Bellinge. Sharon was also a lead in the CASPAR project at Spring Boroughs.

2 Information

- 2.1 Prior to the site visits, the Panel was issued with various background documents regarding the areas that would be visited.
- 2.2 The site visit to Spring Boroughs and Bellinge on 13th August 2012 was attended by Councillor Danielle Stone, Chair, Scrutiny Panel 1, Councillor Christopher Malpas, Sergeant Rod Williams, Northants Police, Laura Major, Crime Prevention Manager, Northants Police, and Tracy Tiff, Scrutiny Officer.

Spring Boroughs

- 2.3 Major environmental improvements, as part of Cleaner, Safer Greener funding, had taken place a few years previously, which included new fencing, the adoption of Secured by Design principles as part of the refurbishment of Beaumont and Claremont Houses, play spaces for children, the creation of secure parking areas and a boulevard area had

been created outside the local primary school. At the time of the environmental improvements there had been a sense of pride and purpose within the community. A community group had maintained the Pocket Park. This group no longer meets and there were signs of debris, long grass and overgrown borders in the park.

- 2.4 The Site Visit noted a number of issues around some of the blocks of flats, particularly around anti-social behaviour (ASB). The Police are aware of this and are working with Agencies.
- 2.5 The Site Visit further noted that a number of supporting schemes for the area, such as the Swan Project, that offers support to sex workers, and Operation Uncanny are now undertaken at a lower level. However, it is important to note that this is more related to the ASB in this area rather than SAC and violent crime.
- 2.6 Serious Acquisitive Crime figures for the area have started to increase.
- 2.7 The Site Visit was informed that a vetting process for the allocation of tenancies no longer takes place across the town. This therefore, makes it difficult to manage who has moved into the area.

Bellinge

- 2.8 Bellinge comprises 60/40 private/social housing with a number of sheltered housing properties. There were number of walkways throughout the estate, a number of which provided anonymous routes for offenders but at the same time are legitimate routes for residents. The estate was built in 'court style' and each court had a walk way in, with access from any direction. This design made it easy for crimes to be committed. There was previously a huge drug issue on the estate.
- 2.9 Bellinge was the first estate where the Police worked in partnership with the Borough Council to address the issues of crime and disorder. The project was the forerunner of future CASPAR projects and is often referred to as CASPAR ZERO. The estate was so crime ridden as a result of drugs, that a holistic approach to dealing with the many issues was adopted. One solution to reduce the rat runs was to re-design the 'Radburn' style estate by creating cul de sacs by the provision of fencing.
- 2.10 Fencing had been erected to prevent anonymous routes, creating just one way in and out, but there was evidence of lack of maintenance with a number of the fences either damaged or removed. It appeared that some fences had been damaged or removed for some months or years. The Police had reported this damage to NBC. Some fencing had strengthening bars added to prevent them from being jacked open.
- 2.11 The Site Visit heard that on occasions, mothers lifted their children over the fences so that they could go to school, rather than walk the children around, which highlights that the fencing appeared to be perceived by some residents as an inconvenience.

- 2.12 High fences are in situ in a number of areas, causing lack of visibility to the parking areas.
- 2.13 The Site Visit noted that some of the front lawns of the properties were unkempt.

3 Conclusions

- 3.1 Councillors attending the site visit were disappointed that due to the lack of a project such as CASPAR in Spring Boroughs, coupled with the current economic climate and lack of officer presence in the area that it had deteriorated. The previous benefits of a Community Group undertaking gardening activities in Pocket Park were realised.
- 3.2 Vice and drug issues are prominent in Spring Boroughs and the 'broken window syndrome' appeared to be the forerunner to crime.
- 3.3 There appeared to be a lack of maintenance management at some apartment blocks, for example the access controlled car park at two connected buildings was not working. The Site Visit concluded that it should be verified whether this was a breach of planning conditions or the responsibility of the relevant Housing Association.
- 3.4 The development of a Neighbourhood Forum for the area is currently taking place, but there is a need for it to comprise at least 21 individuals who either work or reside in the area. The Site Visit felt it would be useful for at least one individual from each of the houses (block of flats) to be elected to the Forum.
- 3.5 The Site Visit further concluded that people need to be empowered and take responsibility for where they live but there is the need for the support of Agencies to achieve this.
- 3.6 The Site Visit agreed that there was a need for more integrated and partnership working between Agencies.
- 3.7 The Site Visit further agreed that there appeared to be lack of maintenance around Bellinge, particularly regarding damage to and the removal of fencing. There was a lot of litter visible and grass verges had not been cut.

3 Recommendations

- 3.1 That the information gathered from the site visit to Spring Boroughs be used to inform the Panel's evidence base.
- 3.2 That details of the site visit to Spencer Ward be provided to the next meeting of the Panel on 26th November 2012.

Author: Tracy Tiff, Overview and Scrutiny Officer, on behalf of Councillor Danielle Stone, Chair, Scrutiny Panel 1.

Date: 24th September 2012