

NORTHAMPTON BOROUGH COUNCIL

MINUTES OF SCRUTINY PANEL 1 SERIOUS ACQUISITIVE CRIME AND VIOLENT CRIME/ COMMUNITY SAFETY

Wednesday, 10 October 2012

COUNCILLORS PRESENT:	Councillor Danielle Stone (Chair), Councillor David Palethorpe (Deputy Chair), Councillors Michael Ford, Dennis Meredith and Christopher Malpas	
CO-OPTED MEMBER:	Sharon Henley	Crime Prevention Design Advisor Community Safety Team, Northamptonshire Police
	Chief Inspector Max Williams	Northants Police
	Neil Bartholomey	Chair Northampton Pub Watch
Witnesses	Councillor David Mackintosh	Leader of the Council
	Julie Seddon	Chair of Community Safety Partnership
	Lesley Wearing	Director of Housing
Officers	Debbie Ferguson	Safer Stronger Partnership Manager
	Tim Ansell	Housing Services Manager
	Will Finn	Community Safety Data Analyst
	Tracy Tiff	Scrutiny Officer
	Joanne Birkin	Democratic Services Officer

1. APOLOGIES

There were none.

2. MINUTES

Subject to changing Councillor Malpas' name from Chris to Christopher and changing the reference to Mr Norrie as observing and not attending the meeting the minutes of the meeting held on 15th August 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) LEADER OF THE COUNCIL NBC

Councillor David Mackintosh, the Leader of the Council, addressed the Panel and gave answers to the core questions.

The responses were as follows:

Serious Acquisitive Crime

1. *What activity as an organisation/department do you undertake to address/tackle issues of Serious Acquisitive Crime (burglary, robbery, theft from/theft of a vehicle)?*

Most of the work in tackling issues is through the Community Safety Partnership which has been in operation since 1998. Work is also carried out by neighbourhood wardens, particularly in terms of providing advice etc. and some special behaviour units.

The Leader of the Council also has regular liaison meetings with the Police.

2. *What activity as an organisation/department do you undertake to **prevent** issues of Serious Acquisitive Crime (burglary, robbery, theft from/theft of a vehicle)?*

There is rigorous data analysis of the reported crimes within the area, which allows hotspots to be identified and identification of problem areas. This and information from Neighbourhood Wardens is used by the Police to help target resources.

3. *What do you see as the main issues and barriers to successfully addressing Serious Acquisitive Crime within the borough of Northampton?*

Resources are scarce for all organisations, but using the data analysis and working in partnership helps to make the most of the resources available.

There are also some historical geographical and infrastructure issues that cause difficulties in certain areas. Work has been in some areas via CASPAR Projects such as that carried out in Spring Boroughs. This approach has been rolled out to a Borough wide approach. All projects start with a complete environmental audit of the area. Work is currently being undertaken in the Spencer and Kings Heath wards.

4. *What activity do you undertake in partnership with other organisations/ departments to tackle issues of Serious Acquisitive Crime within the borough of Northampton?*

The Leader attends regular Community Safety partnership meetings and has regular liaison meetings with the Police. When specific issues are identified then there are meetings with the relevant ward Councillors and partnership agencies to try to identify actions.

5. *What do you see the role of the Police Crime Commissioner to be in preventing and tackling serious acquisitive crime and violent crime?*

The role of the Police and Crime Commissioner should be that of setting the direction of policing in Northamptonshire and bringing partners together. There also needs to be a further exploration of the use of restorative justice and the wider criminal justice system.

Violent Crime

1. *What activity as an organisation/department do you undertake to address/tackle issues of violent crime?*

Neighbourhood wardens and the Licensing team act to enable early recognition of problems and try to prevent escalation of problems. Licensing works in liaison with partners to undertake inspections and enforcement.

The Council has played an important role in the enablement of data sharing, for example, on accident and emergency statistics enabling the Police to be able to quickly identify where they need to be deployed.

2. *What activity as an organisation/department do you undertake to **prevent** issues of violent crime?*

The Council has an important part to play in awareness campaigns, for example the “tackle the problem before it kicks off” campaign which focussed on the increase in domestic violence during football tournaments.

The Council is also part of work done with Women’s Aid enabling victims of domestic violence to access a bed for the night and not to have to return home to an abusive partner.

3. *What do you see as the main issues and barriers to successfully addressing Violent Crime within the borough of Northampton?*

Alcohol misuse remains at the centre of many problems associated with violent crime. People have changed their pattern of behaviour and are coming into the town centre later and having already consumed alcohol at home. Since the extension of the licensing hours the Police are no longer dealing with problems relating to closing time but a constant stream of incidents.

4. *What activity do you undertake in partnership with other organisations/ departments to tackle issues of Violent Crime within the borough of Northampton?*

There is a lot of information available for all partners and members of the public. This enables partners to identify hotspots and target resources as effectively as possible.

Information on violent crime statistics and prevention advice experts is provided on the website.

Further to the responses the Panel asked additional questions and the main points of this discussion were as follows:-

- In response to a query regarding what happens when the Council disposes of an asset and concerns that disused property is not made secure and becomes a target for vandalism and anti-social behaviour, It was agreed that these sites needed to be protected or screened from the public and it was agreed that best practice advice should be sought. The Asset Management team was good at responding to problems but perhaps needed to be more proactive.
- There was concern over the role of the neighbourhood wardens, especially as the neighbourhood coordinators were being withdrawn. Members sought assurance that there was still going to be enough of a presence and that the wardens had the level of powers and authority that they needed. There was also some concern that they were only available during normal office hours and that problems tended to occur in the evening or weekends. Members were advised that additional neighbourhood wardens were being recruited and that this may allow for some flexibility in hours worked. In the light of new legislation the powers of the wardens would probably need to be examined and this would be actioned.
- There were issues in areas where fencing had been erected in order to try and solve problems and that these had not been maintained or panels removed to allow easier routes through. The Panel felt that this highlighted the need for ensuring that maintenance is on-going.
- Members asked how the effectiveness of CCTV was evaluated. They were advised that work was done alongside the Police looking at the data hotspots and including arrest information. Last year there was a consultation regarding a reduction in CCTV which was based on withdrawing the cameras in areas where there had not been any arrests.
- Members considered that if an environmental audit had been completed on an area then the relevant actions needed to be carried out. Allocation of resources should reflect the priorities of the Community Safety Partnership.
- Members asked for further information on the job description, role and training for neighbourhood wardens as they felt that there needed to be clarity on the role that they were being expected to fill. They were advised that training is carried out by the Police and that there have been occasions when they have worked outside of their core hours to assist in particular projects.
- Members also felt that there should be more use of strategic planning to try and design out some issues which can help to breed criminal behaviour.

Members of the Panel thanked Councillor David Mackintosh for the very comprehensive response to its core questions.

(B) JULIE SEDDON CHAIR OF CSP

Julie Seddon, the Chair of the Community Safety Partnership addressed the Panel providing answers to the Core Questions.

The main points of discussion were as follows:

- Julie Seddon considered that the Community Safety Partnership was strong and that there was a good evidence base showing the difference that it had made, this was reflected in the fact that it had managed to retain its funding.
- There was a strong working relationship between Council departments. Working relationships were enhanced in places such as the Fish Street base where there are several agencies all in daily contact.
- There was also a strong working relationship with the County Council so that there were no conflicting strategies or policies and that resources were maximised.
- Julie Seddon considered that although the Police and Police Crime Commissioner would be acting for the whole of the county, they would need a strong sense of specific issues that related to Northampton town itself.
- In order to be effective at the prevention of violent and serious acquisitive crime there needed to be more education about the kind of town that Northampton aspired to be and a stronger sense of positive quality of life issues. How the community feels about the town will help to protect it, if there is a strong positive element. There was concern that subsequent to estate walkabouts there was insufficient follow up action and residents felt that they were being ignored.
- It was pointed out that there was no representative from housing services on the Community Safety Partnership and yet access to safe and adequate housing was a basic building block in attempting to build a positive community spirit and discourage crime.
- Members felt that in certain areas the completion of a CASPAR project had been very positive but once the project was over there wasn't any further support for the community and that the funding that had been invested appeared to have been wasted because things were back to their original state. Support and maintenance had to be kept in place in order to make a permanent difference.
- There were concerns that communities were not using open space facilities and that this was not helping to build community spirit. Residents Associations and community forums needed to be encouraged.

Julie Seddon, Chair of the Community Safety Partnership, was thanked for her responses to the core questions.

(C) DIRECTOR OF HOUSING SERVICES NBC

Lesley Wearing, the Director of Housing and Tim Ansell, Housing Services Manager, NBC addressed the Panel and gave answers to the core questions.

The main points of discussion were as follows

The Director of Housing Services has two roles in this context. One is the provider of Council housing and the other is in a wider strategic overseeing of housing quality and provision throughout the Borough.

In regards to the housing provided by the Council work is carried out to try and ensure that security measures such as locks and doors are fitted to a required safety standard. Where problems or hotspots are identified, such as the suitability of entrance doors to blocks of flats they are replaced on a rolling programme basis to make them more secure. Advice is received from Crime Prevention teams on matters such as locks and doors.

Neighbourhood wardens are in daily contact with housing officers and are therefore able to bring potential problems to light at an earlier stage. They also have a role to play in offering advice and assistance to tenants and to help run crime awareness campaigns such as problems relating to cold callers.

There are several housing policies currently out for consultation, including Housing Allocations which will change the way in which future tenancies are run.

There were some concerns raised concerning how tenancies were allocated, with a feeling that in some areas there has been the creation of a “cocktail of residents” that have caused problems. It was explained that the introduction of choice based letting meant that the potential tenant bids for a particular property and that there was no direct influence over individual allocations. There are large numbers requesting accommodation every month and very little in the way of available tenancies. Emergency category people were taking the majority of new tenancies and there is little opportunity to make significant changes to the existing.

Northampton Borough Council is taking part in the Chartered Institute of Housing Cleaner and Safer Estates initiative.

Lesley Wearing and Tim Ansell were thanked for their responses to the core questions.

6. NEIGHBOURHOOD WARDENS NBC

The Panel considered that there were still a number of matters that needed to be clarified in respect of the job descriptions, training and other aspects of the role of the NBC Neighbourhood Wardens and that therefore it would be better to defer consideration of the matter to the next meeting.

AGREED: (1) That further details regarding the job role, training and other aspects of the role of the Neighbourhood wardens be provided to the next meeting.

- (2) That consideration of the response to the core questions by the Neighbourhood Wardens be deferred to the next meeting.

7. BRIEFING NOTE: SITE VISIT TO SPRING BOROUGHS

The Panel considered a briefing note on the Site visit to Spring Boroughs and Bellinge.

The main points of discussion were as follows:

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.

Vice and drug issues are prominent in Spring Boroughs and the 'broken window syndrome' appeared to be the forerunner to crime.

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.

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.

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.

The Site Visit agreed that there was a need for more integrated and partnership working between Agencies.

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.

AGREED:

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

The meeting concluded at 8:20 pm