

NORTHAMPTON BOROUGH COUNCIL

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

Monday, 4 February 2013

COUNCILLORS PRESENT:	Councillor Danielle Stone (Chair), Councillors Mick Ford, Brendan Glynane, Christopher Malpas and Brian Sargeant	
CO-OPTED MEMBERS	Sharon Henley Chief Inspector Max Williams	Northamptonshire Police Northamptonshire Police
Witnesses	Adam Simmonds Superintendent Richard James John Farrell	Northamptonshire Police and Crime Commissioner - Item 5 (A) Northampton Police and Crime Commissioner - Item 5 (A) Assets Director EMS Item - 5(B)
Officers	Debbie Ferguson Tracy Tiff Joanne Birkin	Safer Stronger Partnership Manager Scrutiny Officer Democratic Services Officer

1. APOLOGIES

An apology for absence from the meeting was received from Councillor David Palethorpe.

2. MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on 10 January 2013 were approved and signed by the Chair.

3. DEPUTATIONS / PUBLIC ADDRESSES

There were none.

4. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST (INCLUDING WHIPPING)

Councillor Brendan Glynane declared an interest as a member of the Northamptonshire Police and Crime Panel.

Councillor Christopher Malpas declared an interest in item 5(b) as he lived in an area which was to be subject to additional project work done by EMS in conjunction with The Princes Trust.

5. WITNESS EVIDENCE

(A) POLICE AND CRIME COMMISSIONER

Mr Adam Simmonds, the Northamptonshire Police and Crime Commissioner attended the Panel, along with Superintendent Richard James of Northamptonshire Police to give the Panel an overview on how the work of the Panel could feed into his work programme.

The main points of the discussion were as follows:-

Mr Simmonds explained that since his election in November he had been putting together a work programme and associated budget. The work programme had been informed by public consultation and would be agreed by the Police and Crime Panel in March 2013.

He advised the Panel that he had set the following priorities:-

- Reduction in violent crime by 40% over a five year period
- Tackling Anti-Social Behaviour
- Reducing drug related crime
- Reducing re offending

He considered that Northampton had a vital role to play in achieving those goals. It being the largest town and geographically centrally located and the local Community Safety Partnership having a proven track record.

With regard to violent crime he felt that it was a common misconception that violent crime was only taking place within the town centre, on a Friday /Saturday night. He pointed out that a lot of violent crime took place in domestic situations and this was an area where there is a high level of reoffending.

Mr Simmonds accepted that the focus on drug prevention would be a more long term aim but he wanted to try and understand the reasons that people become addicted to drugs in the first place. He commented that drug use often leads to a wide range of offending behaviour including acquisitive crime and violent crime.

He considered that the Borough Council had an important role to play in making sure that those families that need help were targeted early and their problems addressed in a holistic way. Often a range of service providers would be involved in finding solutions for the problems, which may encompass a number of issues such as inadequate housing and exclusion from school. The Borough Council could play a vital role in bringing those agencies together.

Originally he had felt that there were too many priorities, which is why the Community Safety Partnership has focussed on three priorities for the next 18 months and these will be aiming to deliver transformational change before moving on to any future priorities. There will be a longer term Policing Plan which will extend beyond the term of his office.

Mr Simmonds also explained that he had been involved in securing funding and the Government funding for Northamptonshire Police has been reduced by £3.2 million. He

made representations regarding this and emphasised that it would be vital to ensure that partnerships deliver results whilst accepting there would be fewer resources.

Mr Simmonds stated that Northampton was facing problems which in some aspects, such as drug trafficking, were on the same scale as inner city areas such as London, Manchester and Merseyside. He believed that there would be lots of potential opportunities for improvements and new ways of working. The Community Safety Partnership was in a strong position and had been consistently delivering improvements for some time.

He expressed concern over the young people who had been excluded from school. Some had been only subject to 4 hours a week education and had little structure to fill the void of school. He considered that there was a strong possibility that they could find themselves in further trouble. He considered that all partners should work together to try and give them a focus.

Members expressed a feeling that young people did not think of themselves as children and to use the terms "kids" or "children" only alienated them further. It was felt that if any training was provided as a result of the Panel's recommendations this should be highlighted and the use of terminology considered carefully.

Members asked if Mr Simmonds felt that the work that had been done in the town centre meant that that violent crime had been displaced and was now being found in other places. He responded that violent crime had been decreasing by 10% a year, and if that continued that would alone meet the violent crime reduction targets. He did not consider that it had been displaced in terms of geographical area but there seemed to be changes in the type of violent crime experienced for example 40% of current violent crime being domestic.

Mr Simmonds felt that the growth in domestic violence needed to be thoroughly examined. This would need the help of many different agencies, for example probation, health and the voluntary sector. There could be many factors influencing this, such as the increase in drinking at home and the impact of the economy, all of which can lead to a family reaching crisis point.

Members asked whether incidents of violence at hospitals were being reported. It was uncertain how often incidents were reported; and suggested that some were not reported as they were dealt with internally by members of the hospital staff. Sometimes officers were called to deal with incidents. Mr Simmonds considered that there were probably occasions where the person involved may be suffering from an illness rather than being under the influence of alcohol. He questioned whether a medical card system could be introduced in a similar way to diabetics carrying an insulin alert.

Members asked whether it could be assumed that the Northampton Community Safety Partnership (CSP) could rely on the same amount of funding as it had been proven to be effective. Mr Simmonds responded that there would be a 25% overall reduction in the funding, so CSP's would be asked to bid for funding for their activities. He also stated that it was vital that the makeup of the CSP's was revised to ensure that all of the correct partners had been included.

In relation to Anti -Social Behaviour Mr Simmonds felt that people did not always know who they needed to report things to and he was hoping to introduce a central reporting system, hosted by the Police. The new system would direct queries and give a better response time as current reporting systems took too long and people wanted a quick response to such problems.

Members asked whether Mr Simmonds would be producing an annual report, and given that partners played a key role in delivering results whether there would be some analysis of their performance. He responded that he had no intention of producing anything that might be seen as “naming and shaming” as he felt that it was in everyone’s interests to make Northampton a safer place. He considered that it might be more difficult to gain focus from some other agencies which covered much larger areas and acknowledged that some organisations such as the Crown Prosecution Service and the Probation Service were undergoing massive restructuring which could affect their role within the local area.

Members reminded Mr Simmonds that they were at the heart of their communities and there should be a better information flow between local Councillors and the Police wherever possible. They were advised that there was a community alert system which Members could subscribe too which would keep them up to date with incidents in their area; it was also pointed out that it would be useful for Members to be made aware of any trends which may identify hotspots or particular problems.

The Chair explained that the Youth Forum had attended the Panel and that it had been identified that even young people who were engaged, still felt that there were gaps in their understanding about where they could go for help or raise any concerns that they had. She asked what Mr Simmonds felt could be done to promote engagement and education of young people. Whilst there were a number of youth projects in place he agreed that he would like to see a much wider range of activities. In a years’ time his intention was to hold a youth engagement event, which would include a shadowing event, multimedia forums and entertainment culminating in a music event. He also considered that organisations should be encouraging youth branches- such as the Police Cadets and he was contacting the Fire Service about re introducing a young fire fighters branch.

He also stated that he would like to introduce a mentoring scheme whereby prominent people in Northampton would be encouraged to mentor a young person and help them to become more ambitious. He also felt that it was important that young people were encouraged to think about their futures and try to make positive influences on them.

Mr Simmonds was asked whether he felt that there were tensions between what communities want and what the Police or other partners wanted, for example the use of community space which might be seen as uninviting or too dangerous for women or children to use . He replied saying that he had asked about introducing trees and seats in the street scape around the Bridge Street area when that is developed to be advised that they were potential weapons if fights broke out. He felt that it was important to try to encourage proper behaviour. Wherever possible potential problems needed to be addressed at the planning stage out and he hoped that this would be taken into consideration during the various redevelopment projects due in the town.

Superintendent James emphasised that it was still important that problems were reported. The Police were currently undertaking a performance review and are looking to progress positive engagement. They had engaged Northampton University to assist them in looking at best practice in community engagement, with the aim of improving social cohesion. There needed to be a commitment to get to the route of problems within communities and to assist in this the Police Community Support Officers (PCSO's) had received training on problem identification. There was currently a trial in the South West Sector of the County in which the community was encouraged to draw pictures of their neighbourhood. Those pictures had revealed issues that the Police were unaware of. Matters not considered to be within the Police remit would be passed to the relevant agency. The Panel considered this initiative would help to engage with the community and identify problems and the ward Councillors could be a long term strategic link.

Mr Simmonds concluded by saying that he would welcome the Panel's report and hoped that it would offer support, advice and help to deliver at a strategic level. He was trying to identify all partners at a local level and wanted to involve them all in delivering solutions that were sustainable. Members felt that there was a potential role for them in ensuring that the solutions remained viable.

The Panel thanked Mr Simmonds and Superintendent James for attending the meeting.

AGREED:

1. That a potential recommendation of the final report be that any training given should be mindful of the need to use language which does not alienate any particular group.
2. That a potential recommendation of the final report be that information systems between the Police and the local Councillors be improved and developed.
3. That a potential recommendation of the final report be that support be given to the skill set problem identification initiative.

(B) ASSETS DIRECTOR EMS

Mr John Farrell, Assets Director Enterprise Managed Services (EMS), attended the Panel to give answers to the Panel's core questions. The main points of the discussion were as follows:-

The Panel had already received a written response to its' questions.

Mr Farrell commented that he had not long been in post and part of his remit had been to assess the current levels of performance. He felt that he had identified some places where there were problems to be resolved.

He stated that there were approximately 12,000 Housing Association properties which were surrounded by green space which had been difficult to manage. Higher rates of serious acquisitive crime had been found in those areas. These areas were subject to problems such as fly tipping and general environmental abuse. He felt that areas which appeared to be neglected proved attractive for criminal activity.

He informed the Panel that EMS were required to respond to fly tipping incidents within 24 hours. As an example of the scale of the problem he said that there were 600 incidents in November 2012. Quick responses to problems such as this were vital in preventing further deterioration.

He considered that it was very important that the Council works with other agencies to ensure that improvements were made and that patterns could be identified. He would like to see local communities, and particularly young people, more actively involved in clearing up those problem areas and felt that those people would then have more of a stake within their community.

Members expressed concern over the level of cleanliness of certain areas and the car parks were mentioned, however these were not areas for which EMS had responsibility. It was felt that there was a public perception that all areas were EMS's responsibility and this could lead to misunderstandings about expectations of service. It was important that there were clear lines of communication and where problems were identified action was taken quickly to rectify them whoever's responsibility they were.

He suggested that the most important element was to encourage an element of self-policing and proper reporting to ensure that a correct picture was available. The Neighbourhood Wardens had expressed some concern at the expectations surrounding their new role and Mr Farrell assured Members that they were being supplied with engagement forms and trained on the correct reporting routes. The Neighbourhood Wardens play a vital role and this has been reflected by including them on the Community Safety Partnership (CSP) Forums so that they could feed directly into the work of the CSP. In one case this had already led to direct action and a change of prioritisation.

Members felt that a lot of Anti-Social Behaviour was connected to litter and environmental problems. It was felt that there needed to be a stronger process where the information flow was stronger and responses quicker. Any action that could break the cycle of negative behaviour was to be welcomed.

With regard to the number of fly tipping incidents work was underway to see if the large number of incidents were related to problems which people had with access to home waste and recycling centres.

Members also heard that there were problems with regards to shared areas at housing complexes and in places such as private alleyways. Those areas caused a series of problems and somehow needed to be found to remove demarcations and ensure that they were dealt with quickly when problems were reported.

Mr Farrell replied that there had been criticism that agencies did not know when work was scheduled and as such it was not possible for agencies to work most effectively or public concerns addressed quickly. He commented that schedules were now provided to the Council so they are aware of what work is being done in what area.

Mr Farrell commented that working with partners and other agencies was also vitally important to provide an holistic approach to making improvements. The Princes Trust was engaged in some work in the Bellinge area in which EMS were involved. The Chair also

commented that the HOPE Trust was engaged in some community partnership work which would require input from EMS.

Mr Farrell believed that it was important that young people in particular were not cast into the roles of victim or perpetrators of crime. He felt that everyone should be given a chance to get involved in their area and that organisations such as the Council had a major role to play in providing jobs and encouraging the young people to help them find alternatives to crime.

The Panel thanked Mr Farrell for his attendance at the meeting.

AGREED:

(C) NORTHAMPTON YOUTH FORUM

The Panel considered a written response from the Youth Forum on the additional questions they had been asked by the Panel at the last meeting.

The Young People who had responded felt that crime affecting young people could be better prevented by providing more facilities such as youth clubs, better lighting, a more visible presence and the introduction of a curfew.

They also considered they could best help themselves from falling victim of crime by education, better engagement with available facilities, greater parental involvement and greater attention to personal safety and awareness of risks.

They felt that the best route for them to request help or gain information was through schools.

AGREED: The information gathered by the Youth forum be used to inform the Panel's evidence base.

6. BACKGROUND DATA

Ethnicity Profiles

The Panel considered background data on the ethnicity profile of the population of Northampton as gathered from the 2011 census.

This showed that the European origin population was 7.5% with Poland specifically at 2.6%. Members expressed surprise at this as they felt that public perception would be that the numbers would be higher.

Members were informed that by March of this year it would be possible to have a breakdown showing ethnicity profiles for different areas of town.

Serious Acquisitive Crime Trends

The Panel considered information on Serious Acquisitive Crime Trends which showed that vehicle crime, which had been reducing over the last three years had been increasing. Both thefts from motor vehicles and thefts of motor vehicles had increased by more than 20%. This was a figure that was reflected in national trends.

Members asked whether the reason for this trend was known and were informed that locally there had been an increase in thefts related to improperly secured vehicles where windows or doors had been left open. There were also cycles which related to whether criminals known for this type of activity were in prison. Currently it was known that there were several individuals who were known for car crimes who were at large in the community.

AGREED: The background information be used to inform the Panel's evidence base.

7. POTENTIAL ITEM FOR OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY WORK PROGRAMMING EVENT.

The Chair reminded the Panel that during previous discussion it had been suggested that a potential item for future scrutiny could be Review of Interpersonal violence. The Overview and Scrutiny Work Programming event is scheduled for 27th March 2013 which is before the final report of the Panel would have been presented to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee. In this case she suggested that this item should be put forward to the Work Programming event for consideration.

AGREED: A potential item on a Review of Interpersonal violence be submitted for consideration to the Overview and Scrutiny Work Programming event scheduled for 27th March 2013

The meeting concluded at 7:30 pm