

Housing & Community Safety Select Committee

A meeting of Housing & Community Safety Select Committee was held on Thursday, 12th February, 2009.

Present: Cllr Julia Cherrett (Vice-Chairman), Cllr Jackie Earl, Cllr Robert Gibson, Cllr Mohammed Javed, Cllr Bill Woodhead

Officers: Mike Batty (DNS); Peter Mennear, Sarah Whaley, Chris Lunn (LD)

Also in attendance: Chief Inspector Ted Allen (Cleveland Police); Mr F.W. Hayes, Mrs Freda Robinson

Apologies: Cllr Mrs Allison Trainer (Chairman), Cllr Mrs Liz Nesbitt, Cllr Mrs Suzanne Fletcher, Cllr Bill Noble

HCS 50/08 Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

HCS 51/08 Minutes of the meeting held on 13 November 2008

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting held on 13th November 2008 were signed as a correct record.

HCS 52/08 Minutes of the meetings held on 18th December 2008 and 29th January 2009

Consideration was given to the draft minutes of the meetings held on 18th December 2008 and 29th January 2009.

In relation to the minutes of the meeting held on 29th January 2009, Cllr Gibson queried the cost of the CCTV cameras. Members were informed that two of the mobile cameras were available for Ward Councillors on request, and a £375 installation fee for contractual and mounting charges, and a £200 weekly rental charge were payable. It was noted that these were funded through Small Environmental Improvement Budgets (SEIBs). Members raised concern over the pressures facing SEIBs, and raised questions as to whether other sources of funding were available to finance additional cameras, rather than relying solely on SEIBs. The Committee was informed that budgets were facing severe pressure.

Members discussed how local criminals were able to identify when a camera was not operational. The Head of Community Safety informed the Committee that it was probable that they were able to work out blind spots where cameras were operational, and also whether a camera was operational at all, and so identification of 'dummy' cameras would be possible.

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meetings held on 18th December 2008 and 29th January 2009 be approved and forwarded to Council.

HCS 53/08 Review Of Neighbourhood Policing/Neighbourhood Watch/CCTV

Members received evidence from Chief Inspector Ted Allen in relation to the Scrutiny Review of Neighbourhood Policing/Neighbourhood Watch/CCTV. The

main points covered were as follows:-

- Members learned that during 2007-08, each Ward in the Borough was allocated a dedicated team of at least one Police Constable and one Police Community Support Officer (PCSO). The Committee was informed that there were 38 Police Officers and 55 PCSOs in the Stockton Borough dedicated to Neighbourhood Policing. The aim of these teams was to provide visibility and accessibility to local people and that community involvement was important in dealing with local issues. Members were informed that initiatives, which included conducting environmental audits for visual problems such as graffiti, and conducting face-to-face surveys with local residents, had proven successful. The Committee also heard that Cleveland Police had signed up to and endorsed the national 'Policing Pledge' which was rolled out by the Government in January 2009; this also related strongly to Neighbourhood Policing.

- Chief Inspector Ted Allen informed the Committee that a local PCSO had suggested introducing a new initiative entitled 'Cuppa with a Copper'. Intended to reinforce the idea of Neighbourhood Policing and the notion of community engagement, officers would go along to unexplored venues such as gymnasiums, making themselves available to the harder to reach sectors of the community. These visits would be advertised in advance, indicating to members of the public the dates and times that they would be available to discuss any issues and/or answer any questions that they may have. The Committee was also informed that future marketing activity could include the distribution of postcards displaying an image and contact details of the area's Neighbourhood Policing team. These cards would be posted through every resident's door to raise awareness. There was a realisation that more needed to be done in order to further highlight the work of local policing teams.

- Members also learned about Cleveland Police Force's abstraction policy, and were informed that, compared to a national target of 80%, the policy in Stockton was for officers to spend 100% of their time in their allocated wards. It was hoped by Chief Inspector Allen that this would remain the case. It was noted that a reserve team based in Thornaby was readily available to work on incidents as required, and cover absences.

- Chief Inspector Allen also informed the Committee that all Schools had a list of the officers and PCSOs responsible for their area. It was noted that community engagement with Schools was on-going. Members were informed that a volunteers programme had been established to assist in increasing the levels of engagement with younger members of the community who were often the most difficult to reach. It was hoped that it would be possible to utilise the skills of such volunteers, especially with regard to IT, and such things as social networking.

- Members discussed the confusion surrounding the level of powers that a PCSO had. The Committee was informed that a list of statutory and discretionary powers were in place, however these were subject to a national review. The discretionary powers had not been used very much so far in Cleveland, and officers in the area generally did not favour a large expansion of PCSO powers. This was due to the need for PCSOs to remain close to their primary aim of being highly visible and non-confrontational. Members praised the role of PCSOs and the extra support they provided.

The Committee also discussed the added value that Neighbourhood Policing brings to local communities, as well as the perception/fear of crime versus actual crime figures. Members were informed that the most fearful groups included women, elderly persons, those aged 16-24 years, and ethnic minority groups. The Scrutiny Officer informed Members that a series of focus groups with representatives from these groups had been arranged. Chief Inspector Ted Allen enquired about the possibility of incorporating a question into the focus group meetings that would help identify the reasons why people felt fearful of crime; the Scrutiny Officer agreed to integrate this. It was considered that the national media magnified problems that existed elsewhere, and that there was generally a reduced tolerance of activities that were viewed as being anti-social, that would not previously have been recorded as such. In some specific areas of higher crime, the tolerance levels had increased and this had the opposite effect of reducing the numbers of incidents that were reported.

The Committee was made aware of the production of local 'crime maps'; the Scrutiny Officer gave a demonstration of the link from the Safer Stockton website, and the version on the Cleveland Police website.

RESOLVED that the information be noted.

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54/08**

Work Programme

The Scrutiny Officer presented Members with the following additional information in the form of handouts:-

- Further information regarding Planning Obligations and CCTV,
- Further information on Neighbourhood Watch, received from Ron Baker, Police Liaison Officer for Stockton District, and
- End of Year Police Authority Consultation Report.

Members queried when the review would be submitted to Cabinet; this was scheduled for April 2009.

RESOLVED that the work programme be noted.