

COMMUNITY SAFETY PARTNERSHIP TASK GROUP

3 DECEMBER 2014

Present: Councillor K McLeod (Chair)

Councillors J Aron, S Bolton, B Mehta, M Mills and S Williams

Also present: Inspector Nick Lillitou (minute numbers 8 to 12)

Officers: Community Safety Manager
Committee and Scrutiny Support Officer (AG)

8 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence had been received from Councillor Martins.

9 DISCLOSURE OF INTERESTS

There were no disclosures of interest.

10 MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on 22 July 2014 were submitted and signed.

11 DISCUSSION OF VISIT TO THE WATFORD CCTV CONTROL ROOM

The Chair said that the visit was very interesting and the number of CCTV cameras in the town was impressive. She explained that a business case had been made for CCTV for the past 10 to 12 years and each camera was evaluated as to need and usefulness every year. She added that people may request new cameras, and that demand for these had increased every year – although not every request was accepted. Furthermore, usage of the cameras was also on the rise demonstrating the value of the control room. She concluded by saying that the police requested assistance with CCTV on criminal investigations as did insurance companies and victims (using freedom of information requests).

In response to a question from Councillor Aron about funding for heat sensing devices, Inspector Lillitou confirmed that the equipment was used to help discover evidence of cannabis factories. He said that where necessary he could seek partnership funding for the purchase of the equipment. Councillor Williams asked how the devices worked in this context. Inspector Lillitou explained that when pointed towards an object they gave a reading showing any increase in temperature indicating the possible existence of a cannabis factory (where

temperatures tended to be higher for cultivation purposes). This information could then be used with other intelligence as part of the search warrant application process.

The Chair asked whether the Task Group could help the police with funding around the purchase of CCTV – perhaps through the Town Centre Partnership. Inspector Lillitou explained that he had been looking in to the purchase of portable cameras and this had been discussed at the Joint Agency Group; as the equipment had been used elsewhere in Hertfordshire. He explained how the portable cameras operated and said that he was monitoring developments in technology, so as to ensure equipment was purchased at the most appropriate time. Again, he could seek partnership funding where necessary.

Councillor Mills asked whether signs indicating CCTV was in operation could help resolve problems in localities. Inspector Lillitou confirmed that these could act as a deterrent and were useful in the town centre - but would not be suitable for covert operations. He further explained that he was looking at systems where images could be transmitted directly in to the police station.

In response to a further question from Councillor Mills, Inspector Lillitou said he would be more than happy for Members to approach him direct if they considered portable CCTV would help deal with a problem in their area. The Chair asked that Inspector Lillitou's details be circulated to all council Members, together with the briefing paper provided to the Group by the Transport and Projects Officer in advance of the visit to the CCTV Control Room.

ACTION – Committee and Scrutiny Support Officer

The Chair asked whether there was a protocol for the use of portable cameras. Inspector Lillitou explained that prior to deployment of CCTV equipment, various processes had to be completed to ensure compliance with legislation around privacy, interference of rights and RIPA (Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act); and therefore each case would need to be individually assessed as opposed to having a generic protocol.

Councillor Williams asked whether it would be appropriate for a traders group, for example, to approach Members seeking the use of CCTV to deal with parking on double yellow lines. Inspector Lillitou explained that in these circumstances the use of CCTV would probably be disproportionate and that in any event personnel could be deployed to address the problem on the ground.

The Chair asked how partnership working could be utilised to help in the development of more effective CCTV. Councillor Aron gave an example discussed by the Transport and Projects Officer during the CCTV Control Room visit. This related to him working with the hospital in her ward to help link cameras in Tolpits Lane so they would all be under one umbrella and be more effective to monitor as a result.

Inspector Lillitou introduced a paper outlining crime trends in Watford and the activities being undertaken to address the issues. He outlined the historical context in that crime has reduced each year of the last 5 years. As a result it would be challenging for these to be maintained. He explained that there had been a rise in overall crime this year, and that this may be partly due to new crime recording rules introduced by the Home Office. These now required that each victim of an incident be recorded as an individual crime; whereas, previously, an occurrence with multiple victims would have been recorded as one crime. He then gave a presentation on the paper inviting Members to ask any questions.

Councillor Aron asked whether crime prevention messages relating to domestic burglary would be promulgated on the Community Messaging system leading up to Christmas. Inspector Lillitou said that leaflets with crime prevention advice had been provided to commuters at all three of Watford's railway stations on a number of mornings providing further information.

Councillor Mills asked what the Safer Streets campaign involved. Inspector Lillitou explained that was an operation where the Watford Neighbourhood Team would visit a single ward on a particular day to provide domestic burglary prevention advice to residents. This focused activity enabled a large number of people to be approached; with an average of 800 residents visited every month.

In response to a further question from Councillor Mills about the Community Messaging system, Inspector Lillitou explained that people were asked to join during Safer Streets operations, where full details were taken and the resident was then provided with information by e-mail. As a result, all the individual would have to do to join would be to click on a link. Inspector Lillitou said that it was not possible to join the system by telephone – although this could still be done with regard to joining Neighbourhood Watch. Councillor Mills commented that she was a Neighbourhood Watch Coordinator and had not received information from the police of late. Inspector Lillitou undertook to investigate the matter and report back to her.

ACTION – Inspector Lillitou

The Chair asked how else people were encouraged to join the Community Messaging system; as this was seen as a very effective means of communication. Inspector Lillitou provided an example of where a series of burglary offences had been reported, his staff would carry out 'cocooning' methodology; where homes in the locality would be visited and inquiries conducted and crime prevention advice given. During this process, residents would be encouraged to join Community Messaging.

Councillor Mills asked what the acronym 'PPO' meant. Inspector Lillitou said this related to 'Prolific or Other Priority Offenders'; i.e. those most likely to re-offend on release from prison. He explained that prior to release, an action plan was developed to monitor their activities to help prevent and detect any further offending – that could result in their return to prison.

In response to a further question from Councillor Mills, Inspector Lillitou reassured the Task Group that when a convicted paedophile was released from prison back into an area, a detailed plan was put in place to monitor the person concerned to prevent further offending. He added that this was a difficult and sensitive issue but publicising names in these circumstances could lead to vigilantism and was unproductive; it was better to leave the matter in the hands of the relevant agencies who would manage the situation safely. Councillor Mehta asked what action was taken around community reassurance in such circumstances. Inspector Lillitou explained that a message was not automatically provided. Rather, if a situation were to develop that required a media release; this would be prepared in consultation with the relevant agencies and an appropriate message might then be sent out via the police Corporate Communications where deemed appropriate. Councillor Mehta said she was particularly interested in this aspect and would discuss the matter with Inspector Lillitou outside of the meeting.

The Chair asked how reassurance could be provided during 'cocooning' operations. The Community Safety Manager explained that she considered that Members had a key role in providing reassurance to communities. She advised that if there were concerns in communities around any issues, Members should inform Inspector Lillitou. It was important that Members had an understanding of the current crime situation in localities; so they were able to reduce the fear of crime - that could often be unreasonably high. She also asked that Inspector Lillitou be informed where Neighbourhood Watches were working well, as watches provided a sound means to deliver reassuring messages to communities.

Councillor Williams made reference to the new crime recording procedures and the increase in violent offences compared to last year – drawing an analogy of 50 people involved in an altercation potentially resulting in 50 reported crimes. Inspector Lillitou explained that under the revised system that would be the case. He further informed the Task Group that where an offence was dealt with by community resolution this would be recorded as a crime. He added that he was examining data in relation to finalising crimes to determine a true picture of crime levels under the revised recording process. The Chair asked that he seek to provide further information for the next meeting.

Action – Inspector Lillitou

Councillor Williams asked whether there was anything Members could assist with regarding domestic violence. Inspector Lillitou advised that Members should use the Hertfordshire Police and County Council websites as these provided detail of how to report such matters and of the agencies involved. He invited Members to approach him if they wished to report any specific issues. Councillor Aron commented that the processes seemed clear and very well linked together. The Chair explained that a briefing had been given to Members on domestic violence a couple of years ago and that the matter had been discussed at the last Full Council meeting where it was agreed that the briefing

should be provided again. Councillor Williams said that these should be given regularly.

Councillor Bolton asked whether vulnerable people could be identified during Safer Streets operations. Inspector Lillitou explained that it was possible to do this; including the frail elderly and those with mental health issues. He further explained that analysis into calls attended by police helped identify those vulnerable to domestic violence.

The Community Safety Manager informed the panel that domestic violence was now termed more generically as 'domestic abuse'. She explained that the County Council web-link (called 'Sunflower') had recently been refreshed and was very user friendly. She informed the Panel that the County had commissioned research looking in to domestic abuse and this was likely to report in the near future. The findings would likely impact on funding for the Women's Centre.

Councillor Aron outlined the importance of not working alone when meeting with someone with possible mental health issues. She recounted an event when she had the helpful support of PCSO's. The Chair emphasised that Members should always tell someone where they will be if working alone and the Community Safety Manager referred them to the Lone Working Policy.

Councillor Bolton made reference to a slight rise in theft from the person offences; asking whether this might be due to the refurbishment to the top of the town centre and the increase in events in the locality. Inspector Lillitou said that he did not believe this to be the case - the increase in offending was very small with no apparent cause.

Councillor Williams complemented the police for their operations in the town centre, referring to their proactive confiscation of alcohol in restricted areas. He added that the way that ice rink staff had recently dealt with a potentially volatile situation was testament to the excellent education provided by officers. Inspector Lillitou thanked Councillor Williams for his comments, saying this was evidence of partnership working and effective coordination. He added that he was considering whether there should be a permanent Red Cross presence in the town centre with regard to the night time economy as they provided an outstanding service. He would see how matters progressed this year and if cost effective would seek partnership funding for this. The Chair asked whether the Red Cross conducted triage and whether a police officer was always present with them. Inspector Lillitou explained that a police officer used to be in attendance all of the time but this had proved unnecessary. As a result, officers were positioned in the vicinity and were readily contactable to provide assistance as the occasion demanded. This approach was also preferred by the Red Cross.

In response to a question from Councillor Williams, Inspector Lillitou explained that the number of people attending night clubs on key nights was monitored; both with WBC Licensing and through visits to the various premises. He was

satisfied that police had a good understanding of patron numbers at the various establishments.

Councillor Mills made reference to an incident in Chester Road where a large group of youths had run down the street causing damage to resident's front doors. She complimented the police for their deployment of staff which had put an end to such occurrences. Inspector Lillitou thanked Councillor Mills for her comments explaining that he had also deployed plain clothes officers in an attempt to catch the culprits.

The Chair asked how Members could assist the police in engaging with communities. Inspector Lillitou explained that engagement formed part of the Community Safety Partnership Protection Plan. He asked that Members promote Community Messaging and Neighbourhood Watch as these were key mechanisms for the police to engage with the public. He added that police would also approach individual Members for assistance on particular projects because of their excellent community contacts.

Councillor Williams commented that issues like Operation Yew Tree had given the public more confidence to report matters to the police, and that this could only be a good thing. Inspector Lillitou agreed with Councillor William's views and explained that this could result in an increase in reported crime figures. He said that it could take a few years to get a completely accurate picture. The Community Safety Manager said that any increase in crime this year may occur because of the changes in recording standards; therefore it would be more appropriate to use this first year as a baseline measure.

The Chair asked whether the Town Centre Partnership was aware of the high levels of reported crime in Albert Road as this was a perennial problem around the night time economy. Inspector Lillitou explained that they were; as were local businesses and the community - who were reassured by police activity. In fact, there may be a reduction in reported incidents this year due to a number of police operations.

Councillor Mehta asked about the police communication strategy with the media and how they sought for reassurance messages to be delivered. Inspector Lillitou explained that both he and the Watford Police Commander had regular meetings with the local media where they asked the press to keep matters in context. He added that he briefed Members on local issues so that they were aware of the facts when speaking to the press. Councillor Mehta commented that the Panel should support communication with the media.

The Community Safety Manager explained that 'communications' was one of the three priorities in the Community Safety Partnership Plan from April of next year. The others were 'managing crime' and 'supporting victims'. She commented that as the town worked so effectively in partnership, communications was something that should be improved upon. To support this, Council and Police communications departments would work together to develop an action plan. She added that the Task Group may want to see the new Community Safety Partnership Plan before publication to make any comments and to suggest

ideas. She concluded by informing the Task Group that One Watford had temporarily merged with the Watford Responsible Authority Group to establish whether partnership working would be further enhanced as a result. The Chair commented that this was a very good idea, and it would be interesting to see how matters developed. She asked that the Community Safety Manager provide a draft of the Community Safety Plan for the February Task Group meeting.

ACTION – Community Safety Manager

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ACTIONS AND QUESTIONS UPDATE

The Task Group received a report of the Committee and Scrutiny Support Officer updating members on outstanding actions from previous meetings.

It was agreed that a number of actions could be signed off.

The Chair requested that the invitation to all Members to attend the Task Group meeting in February, in relation to the presentation by the Probation Service, be sent before Christmas.

ACTION - Committee and Scrutiny Support Officer

Councillor Aron commented that she had replied to the police as to whether there were any gaps in the list of care homes.

The Chair asked whether a response had been received from Hertfordshire Community Meals. The Committee and Scrutiny Support Officer explained that a response was still awaited. Councillor Williams suggested that PCSO's be invited on visits. Councillor Aron commented that this might be difficult having regard to the size of vehicles used by Hertfordshire Community Meals. The Chair requested that Inspector Lillitou be asked whether it was viable for PCSO's to accompany during the visits.

ACTION - Committee and Scrutiny Support Officer

RESOLVED -

That the update report be noted and the completed actions signed off.

14

MEMBER BRIEFING - NEIGHBOURHOOD WATCH, CRIMESTOPPERS AND OWL MESSAGING

Councillor Aron discussed a presentation given by the Hertfordshire Coordinator for Neighbourhood Watch, at a recent Safer Neighbourhoods meeting, in relation to Neighbourhood Watch, Crimestoppers and Community Messaging. She considered that the information provided would be useful to all Council Members. The Community Safety Manager said that this was a good idea and would provide an update on current practices. The Chair asked that the Hertfordshire

Coordinator for Neighbourhood Watch be asked to prepare a briefing paper for Members and be invited to give a short presentation to Council.

ACTION - Committee and Scrutiny Support Officer to contact the Hertfordshire Coordinator for Neighbourhood Watch requesting the briefing paper, circulating this to Members and arranging for the presentation to be held - similar to the last briefing and prior to Full Council if possible.

The Chair asked if there were any further issues for discussion - none were raised.

Chair

The Meeting started at 7.30 pm
and finished at 9.04 pm