

COMMUNITY SAFETY PARTNERSHIP TASK GROUP

6 MARCH 2012

Present: Councillor K McLeod (Chair)
Councillors K Collett, A Khan, H Lynch, R Martins, M Meerabux
and S Rackett

Also present: Councillor Ian Brown, Councillor Jan Brown, Councillor
Jackie Connal, Councillor Peter Jeffree, Councillor Mo Mills
and Inspector Deidre Dent (Hertfordshire Police)

Officers: Environmental Health and Licensing Section Head
Community Safety Manager
Committee and Scrutiny Support Officer (JK)

17 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

There were no apologies for absence.

There was a change of membership for this meeting: Councillor Rackett
replaced Councillor Lovejoy

18 DISCLOSURES OF INTEREST (IF ANY)

There were no disclosures of interest.

19 MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on 30 January 2012 were submitted and
signed.

20 NEIGHBOURHOOD PRIORITY SETTING

The Chair invited everyone present to introduce themselves. The Task Group
agreed that other councillors who were present could speak. The Chair invited
Inspector Dent to discuss how the neighbourhood priorities were set.

Inspector Dent said the process for setting the priorities was very straight-
forward. She circulated copies of the priorities that were available on the website
of Hertfordshire Constabulary. She explained that there were usually three
priorities identified for each neighbourhood. She noted that in Holywell the
priorities included youth nuisance and vehicle crime and in Oxhey there were
priorities relating to antisocial behaviour and parking. Oxhey was an example of

how the concept worked particularly well and as a result one ward councillor had established a parking action group. In Central, there was a focus on antisocial behaviour and public order offences.

The priorities were refreshed every three months and residents could request a new priority through the Police website. Officers also undertook 'street-meets' with local residents where concerns could be raised about the needs of the neighbourhood. However, officers often met the same few residents and it was harder to get a wider view. Any feedback that was received was balanced against the known crime levels in the area. The priorities were measured by whether there had been a drop in the crime and disorder associated with the priority. The priorities could be refreshed between the three-monthly intervals. She recommended that councillors should meet their local officers regularly to feed in to the priority setting. Residents may have raised different issues with councillors than they did with the Police. The priority setting process may be disrupted during the summer due to Olympics extractions.

Councillor Lynch highlighted that Central ward also contained a residential community as well as the town centre and night time economy. She asked whether the priorities reflected the needs of the community as well as the town centre.

Inspector Dent responded that the priorities included antisocial behaviour which reflected the problems faced by the community. The dispersal routes from the town centre suffered from public order problems. She suggested that the team could consider three priorities for the town centre itself and three for the residential areas.

In response to a question from Councillor Khan, Inspector Dent replied that the best way to communicate views was via the Police website or directly to the Police officers. She added that the priorities were usually chosen on the number of complaints received but it was not a black and white process.

Councillor Rackett asked whether Police officers who were in the ward and were not the designated neighbourhood PC were aware of the priorities.

Inspector Dent explained that there was a Watford team and a North Watford team and there was good communication within the team. The officers who covered the neighbourhood should be aware of ongoing issues. She added that she would be very pleased if there were regular meetings between neighbourhood Police officers and councillors and she wanted to encourage this.

Councillor Rackett suggested that when Police officers were invited to residents' association meetings, councillors could meet them for half an hour beforehand to discuss any issues in the ward. This had worked well in Callowland.

Councillor Lynch asked how the Police responded to problems in one part of the ward. Inspector Dent responded that the PCSO should always be available in the ward and where necessary officers from other neighbourhoods assisted when there was a particular issue to deal with.

Councillor Meerabux commented that the priorities in each neighbourhood reflected the nature of the environment. He noted that cycling on the pavements was a particular problem in Callowland. He asked about the interaction with the Council.

Inspector Dent said that the Police worked with the Council in the Community Safety Partnership and issues were fed in to the Watford Responsible Authorities Group.

The Chair summarised that it was important for councillors to liaise with their local officers to feed in to the process of priority setting.

Councillor Martins advised that there was a need to recognise that the Police were part of the partnership with the Council and other organisations. Some questions were more for the Council than for the Police.

The Community Safety Manager underlined that it was a partnership and that the Partnership considered the impact of future policies.

Purple Flag

The Community Safety Manager updated the Task Group about the Purple Flag application which was an award for a well-managed Night Time Economy. She showed Members a DVD that had been produced for the bid.

She explained that the Purple Flag area was from the college to the end of Market Street. Inspectors had visited the town centre on Saturday night from 3pm to 3am and it had been a busy evening with five to six thousand people in the town.

Councillor Rackett informed the Task Group that he had been part of the team that had developed the Purple Flag award. The towns that had been successful had a good mix of activities available. He noted that Watford currently lacked a cinema. He suggested that retail hours could be altered to encourage this variety.

Street Angels

Councillor Lynch referred to the Street Angels and asked if a more suitable location could be found for them to be based. The Community Safety Manager responded that she was aware of the problem and had been looking at solutions.

Councillor Lynch suggested that a purpose-built facility could be included as part of the regeneration at the top of the town. The Community Safety Manager said she would feed this idea into the suggestions.

FOLLOW UP ON ITEMS RAISED DURING THE YEAR

Night-time Economy

Inspector Dent noted that at their meeting in December the Task Group had asked where offenders in the Night Time Economy were coming from.

Inspector Dent underlined that the figures were not audited, should not be quoted as accurate, and were an indication without the necessary scrutiny to be publicly quoted.

She informed the Task Group that the number of people arrested in the Town Centre for alcohol-related violent crimes had decreased between 2009/10 and 2010/11. Initial data showed that the majority of those arrested were from Watford. Those coming from outside the county tended to be from Harrow, Brent, Uxbridge and Edgware.

Following a question from Councillor Martins, Inspector Dent said the figures were taken from crime reporting and arrest statistics.

Councillor Martins noted that there had been a publicity campaign about alcohol pre-loading and asked whether the end of these initiatives might have an effect on crime levels.

Inspector Dent replied that most initiatives were ongoing and it was just the posters that were coming to an end. Other initiatives seemed to be more effective than posters.

Councillor Khan said that he had read in the newspaper that Albert Road South was classed as the most violent street in Britain. He was embarrassed about the reputation this brought on the town. He understood there was a statistical skew but this was not clear when it was reported.

Inspector Dent noted that the Antisocial Behaviour Coordinator had discussed this with the Task Group at the last meeting. She noted that Albert Road South had only four houses on it and the crime reporting ran from the ring road down the High Street. All incidents in this area were reported under Albert Road South. The ranking was due to the way that the statistics were recorded. She explained that they were Home Office statistics and there was little that could be done. Concerns about the statistics would be registered at the Statutory Partners meeting later in March.

Councillor Mills asked if the violent crime figures related only to the town centre. Inspector Dent confirmed they were for the centre of Watford which was where most of the trouble took place.

Councillor Meerabux noted that some of the figures were from 2009 and the way statistics were measured changed frequently. He asked if the statistics were therefore accurate. Inspector Dent replied that although there had been changes to the charging standards the offences remained the same.

Councillor Collett asked how those banned from the town centre through the 'three strikes' scheme were monitored. Inspector Dent said it only affected eight people and Pubwatch knew who they were.

Councillor Meerabux asked whether policing resources for the Night Time Economy had decreased since 2009. Inspector Dent responded that she did not believe there had been a significant change in policing levels.

Street lighting

The Task Group then discussed the part-night street lighting and the effect on crime and disorder.

Inspector Dent reported that Hertfordshire County Council were monitoring the situation and although people may feel that crime has risen, in all the cases that Inspector Dent had looked at this has not been substantiated by the crime figures. The Antisocial Behaviour Coordinator had discussed with the Task Group that the majority of antisocial behaviour occurred in the early evening and the majority of burglaries were in the day. The problem was more with the perception of crime.

Councillor Lynch said that she had had a lot of correspondence from residents about the route to Watford Junction Station which was not lit.

Inspector Dent said that it was not easy to ask for streetlights to go back on in certain areas. Even if there was a fear of crime there may not be any incidences of crime for the Police to report to the County Council.

The Community Safety Manager advised councillors that they should contact their county councillor if they had concerns about any particular areas. The Police could only respond when there were crime issues.

Councillor Khan said that he had had an email about vehicle crime which advised that cars be parked in well-lit areas. Light and safety went hand-in-hand.

Inspector Dent reiterated that the Police could only act upon reported crime. If there was a series of crimes in one area this could be a pattern that the Police could report to the County Council.

Councillor Collett highlighted the fear that many women experienced in poorly-lit areas such as alleyways and near garages.

Inspector Dent said that this was a county council initiative. She added that fear of crime was higher than it needed to be.

Councillor Rackett noted that it was difficult for people to give accurate witness statements when the lights were out. It caused problems in crime detection.

Councillor J Brown noted that Albert Road South was lit all night and the crime levels were still higher than roads which were not lit.

Councillor Connal agreed with Councillor Collett that the fear of crime was particularly high amongst women at the moment. She noted the example of a recent burglary.

Inspector Dent responded that burglaries tended to take place in the afternoon or evening.

Councillor Martins noted that the initiative was not down to the Police but the County Council. He suggested that a relevant officer be invited to the Community Safety Partnership Task Group in the future.

The Chair agreed and also added that councillors would need a briefing about how to report areas of concern with part-night lighting.

ACTION- Committee and Scrutiny Support Officer

The Chair thanked Inspector Dent and the Community Safety Manager for their contributions.

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ANNUAL SCRUTINY REPORT

The Committee and Scrutiny Support Officer circulated the Task Group's report with the Chair's commentary for Members to review.

The Chair felt that most of the points had been covered. She said that details of the discussions around neighbourhood priorities would be added. She thanked Members for their participation this year.

Councillor Martins suggested that some ideas for future topics for the Task Group be included. These included the probation service, the drug and alcohol strategy and monitoring the street-lighting issues.

Councillor Lynch raised the issue of potential privatisation of police forces. This could be a question to Chief Inspector Caveney. She also added that a question could be asked about whether there were problems with gangs in Watford.

Councillor Rackett noted that the elections of Police and Crime Commissioners would be in November. He asked what the role of the Community Safety Partnership Task Groups would be in the new set up.

ACTION- Committee and Scrutiny Support Officer

Councillor Meerabux noted the lack of black and minority ethnic people on the Purple Flag DVD. He suggested that they may be less involved in the night time economy. Groups should be able to participate equally in the leisure landscape.

Councillor Rackett said he felt that the night time economy was not as diverse as it could be to cater for all residents. He hoped there would be an independent cinema in the Charter Place redevelopment and he referred to the success of the one in Harrow.

Councillor Khan noted the cultural dimension involved.

Councillor Collett added that not everyone would go to the town centre if they wanted to go to a pub or restaurant.

Councillor Rackett reminded Members that there would be an annual scrutiny questionnaire and encouraged them to complete it.

Chair

The Meeting started at 6.30 pm
and finished at 8.15 pm