

COMMUNITY SAFETY PARTNERSHIP TASK GROUP

17 OCTOBER 2011

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

Also present: Cate Hall (Chair of the Community Safety Partnership),
Inspector Deidre Dent (Hertfordshire Police),
Liam Fitzgerald (Anti-social Behaviour Co-ordinator, Watford
Borough Council),
Brian Gale (Community Safety Unit, Hertfordshire County
Council),
John Hughes (Probation Service),
County Councillor Derek Scudder (Hertfordshire Police
Authority),
Jane Taylor (Community Safety Manager, Watford Borough
Council) and
Councillor Peter Jeffree

Officers: Committee and Scrutiny Officer

1 ELECTION OF CHAIR

RESOLVED –

that Councillor Kelly McLeod be elected Chair for the remainder of the 2011/12
Municipal Year.

2 COMMUNITY SAFETY PARTNERSHIP

Cate Hall, the Chair of the Community Safety Partnership and Executive Director
at Watford Borough Council advised that the presentation would explain the
partnership and its role. She gave apologies for John Smith from Hertfordshire
Fire and Rescue and Dawn Moorish from the Primary Care Trust.

The representatives from the Community Safety Partnership introduced
themselves.

Cate Hall explained the reason the Community Safety Partnership had been set
up and its duties. She outlined the different groups which delivered the
partnership's work. The groups were Watford Responsible Authorities Group
(WRAG), the Joint Action Group (JAG), Anti-Social Behaviour Action Group
(ASBAG) and the Night Time Economy Focus Group which was to become the
Purple Flag group.

Cate Hall provided the Task Group with statistics for the last three years and the four priorities for 2011/12. The presentation also included some examples of the Partnership's work.

Cate Hall said that the Community Safety Partnership was happy to work with the Task Group. The representatives had considered whether there were any areas it would appreciate the Task Group investigating. It had been agreed that at the present time there were no specific areas they could suggest.

Members were provided with a copy of the presentation and the Community Safety Partnership's action plan.

Councillor Meerabux said that based on the reduction in crimes it might be considered that there was a reduction in the number of cases being presented at court. He asked whether this was correct.

Cate Hall explained that the courts covered cases wider than the immediate Watford area. Inspector Dent added that it was difficult to match data as some individuals were responsible for several cases.

Councillor Meerabux added that the number of people in prison had risen and there seemed to be a conflict. The public was confused by the different information.

Cate Hall replied that many cases did not attract custodial sentences. The Police compared their data with similar Police force areas across the country. There was not a direct link between the number of court cases and the work of the Partnership. The number of court cases did not explain what was happening in Watford. She added that the Accident and Emergency departments in Watford and Stevenage were carrying out a pilot project, looking at the admissions and if there was a correlation between injuries and alcohol.

Councillor Khan asked whether there were any crime statistics which had increased.

Inspector Dent responded that there was a slight increase in violent crime outside the Town Centre which was related to personal robberies. There was no pattern and they happened at random places across Watford. There had been six incidents in three months which had an impact on the statistics.

Councillor Lynch said that the Stonham premises for ex-offenders, located in central Watford, would be closing next year. The residents did not meet the criteria for social housing and this could have an impact on Watford. She asked for further clarification.

John Hughes said that it was unfortunate that the Stonham accommodation would be lost. The closure had not been properly addressed. Discussions were being held with the Housing Trust. Many of the residents were classified as

single homeless people. It was difficult for the Police to keep track of ex-offenders if they did not know where they were living.

Councillor Lynch added that she was concerned as the residents were not classed as living in Watford and it was likely they would become homeless. She asked what plans were in place with Stonham to manage the situation.

Cate Hall advised that discussions had been held with the County Council. The County Council was trying to create a mix of accommodation across the county. Officers had expressed concern that the hostel, which had been chosen for decommissioning, would have an impact on Watford. Officers had been assured that each person in the hostel would be found alternative accommodation before it closed. The Council's Housing Team was working closely with Stonham.

Councillor Lynch commented that other organisations would be affected, for example Watford New Hope Trust.

Cate Hall informed Members that the decision had not been made at a local level, but at County Hall. Watford Borough Council was also concerned about the closure. The residents in the hostel came from different areas; only four or five had a Watford connection. It was hoped they would be found accommodation near their local area. Following a question about the Housing Trust, Cate Hall said that there were no plans at the present time to change its allocations criteria. She added that there was a general increase in homeless people and it was necessary to consider priorities when allocating permanent accommodation.

Councillor Martins commented that there was a strategic responsibility if there were a perceived negative threat. He asked how the appropriate authorities were informed.

John Hughes advised that Stonham had been a useful resource, but it had not only accommodated probation cases. The issue of homelessness was not only about offenders, it especially affected vulnerable young people. It was a serious national issue.

Councillor Martins said that 'All Together Watford' had been mentioned. He asked whether in the context of the current financial pressures this was a soft target. He asked if its future could be clarified.

Cate Hall explained that the main support for this project was from the staff who worked together and would continue to collaborate. The Community Safety Partnership would continue to use money to support intervention work. Inspector Dent confirmed that night-time economy work would transfer to the Purple Flag Group.

Councillor McLeod referred to the homelessness of ex-offenders. She advised that ex-offenders needed help to change their lives. She asked whether the Probation Service supported them in finding work. They needed to be close to

their families. She asked whether they were left to look after themselves once their probation was finished.

John Hughes informed the Task Group that those people whose prison sentence was under 12 months did not receive support from the Probation Service. Those individuals whose prison sentence was over 12 months had some time under supervision. The Probation Service employed Accommodation Advisers who helped to identify accommodation. There was a small budget to help with rent deposits. With regard to employment, between 20% and 30% on probation caseloads had learning disabilities and were unable to read or write. Some had personality disorders which were linked to offending; some data suggested about 30%. About 50% of the caseload were unemployed and the other 50% were in work. A lot of work took place to get them job ready. He advised that following the successful delivery of one ESF (European Social Fund) contract during the last year, the Service had been awarded ESF2 for two and a half years. It would be the first time that the service would be able to target short-term prisoners if they met the ESF criteria. Some ex-offenders were from families where there was a pattern of worklessness. Addictions were common and the biggest problem was alcohol. The service was starting to have an impact; offenders under supervision had started to be given employment. North Herts Homes had taken on seven offenders, who worked alongside the organisation's other employees. It was necessary to ensure that the offenders were those who would turn up for work.

Councillor McLeod asked whether the Neighbourhood Watch scheme was continuing.

Inspector Dent confirmed that the scheme was continuing. A large number of Holywell residents had recently signed up to the scheme. She advised that the Police Community Support Officers (PCSOs) had been given an objective to increase the membership during this year.

Following Councillor McLeod's comment about back garden burglaries, Inspector Dent replied that there had been a slight increase in the last few weeks. They had occurred in Leggatts as well as Tudor. A new neighbourhood officer had been appointed in Tudor.

Councillor Khan referred to the Night Time Economy (Purple Flag) Group. He asked whether the group had looked at the impact the night-time economy had on St Albans Road.

Inspector Dent stated that there had not been a huge number of reports from that area. She was aware of problems with the late night refreshment premises. Officers did monitor the dispersal routes from the town, which included St Albans Road.

Councillor Khan said that the crime hot spots map put people off reporting incidents. Residents experienced problems with litter and anti-social behaviour.

Inspector Dent replied that unless incidents were reported officers were unable to do anything. PC Andy Crisp had newly been appointed as the Callowland officer. Regular meetings should be arranged by him, including 'street meets'. Residents were able to inform the officer of any local problems. She added that where issues were raised resources could be allocated.

Councillor Khan asked whether there were any recognised issues with gangs or youth crime.

Inspector Dent advised that there was one gang. There was a lot of work being carried out by the Council's Anti-social Behaviour Co-ordinator and Watford Community Housing Trust. Some of the individuals in the gang were criminals. Enforcement and diversionary work was being carried out. Mapping had also been done to show where the gang congregated.

Councillor Khan asked whether there was an ethnicity breakdown carried out within the crime statistics. He also enquired whether there was any targeted intervention was carried out with certain groups.

Inspector Dent stated that there was a breakdown of stop and search cases and hate crimes. Officers concentrated on the vulnerability of individuals. If there were an ethnic element to a crime it was referred as a hate crime.

Councillor Khan questioned whether more statistics should be maintained. This would help to identify patterns and it would be possible to see whether intervention needed to be carried out to help solve problems.

Inspector Dent confirmed that this was carried out. For example, burglaries occurring at Asian houses following weddings or big events. Officers had attended meetings and spoken to people about the action they needed to take following these types of events.

Councillor Khan suggested that partnerships should be set up with different organisations, including the local Mosques and youth groups. If a matter were identified as an ethnic issue officers could work with the relevant parts of the community.

Councillor Meerabux asked further questions related to statistics, including whether the ethnic profile or gender were changing. He also asked whether poor education and exclusion from school had an impact. He asked whether the probation staff understood the background of people from ethnic minorities.

John Hughes informed the Task Group that equal opportunities and respect for diversity were core values for the Probation Trust. Ethnicity and gender monitoring were carried out regularly and the results were published in a Diversity Report which was available on the service's website. This concerned service users as well as staff. The ethnic mix in the Trust was similar to that of the population. The Trust worked hard to reach out to the ethnic community, for example it worked with the African-Caribbean Association. Community payback work was undertaken with the Mosque. The Hare Krishna Farm was involved in

the community payback scheme; this helped to show a different respect for animals.

Mr Hughes spoke about the Anne Frank Trust which carried out work in prisons and schools. The Anne Frank story had been built upon to include modern day scenarios. A pilot scheme would start in January which was equivalent to a level 2 OCN certificate, which offenders would be awarded subject to completing the course to a satisfactory level. Probation officers would be trained to understand the work offenders were expected to do. If the pilot scheme worked the service would try to get the course accredited and would progress it further. Details of the work of the Trust were available on the website, <http://www.annefrank.org.uk/>.

Mr Hughes said that with regard to women offenders, they were about 12% of the offender population. The number of women in prison had increased. The majority of women offenders from Watford went to Peterborough. Depression was common amongst this group; typically they were separated from their children. This year women's centres had been contracted to provide services to this group as they provided services which were more appropriate. He acknowledged the organisation needed to do more work to improve delivery to women offenders and this was a priority.

Councillor Lynch commented that she was concerned about the YMCA. She was involved in a case of a young man who was living at the hostel and was extremely frightened of the people living around him. She asked whether the Partnership had any input into the hostel.

Inspector Dent said that the Police were aware of a few people living in the hostel. There were, however, very few complaints. It was necessary for staff or people living there to report problems.

Councillor Lynch said that she was aware that random checks took place during the day but not in the evening.

Cate Hall advised that the YMCA was a national organisation and the Council did not have a funding relationship with the local hostel. She was aware of individual Councillors' concerns. Officers reported these to the YMCA, but they were generally about benefits and not crimes taking place. If problems were not reported it was not possible to take action. She suggested that if Members were concerned about the YMCA they could call the representatives into a meeting to discuss any issues.

Councillor Lynch added that the support package for residents was very limited.

Councillor McLeod referred to anti-social behaviour near schools, particularly at drop off and pick up times. Local school head teachers had asked for help. Parking wardens had been asked to visit these locations and give out parking tickets. Some people stopped their cars in the middle of the road. She asked whether this had been raised at the Community Safety Partnership.

Liam Fitzgerald said that most anti-social behaviour was related to vehicles. People's attitude to road use had changed over time. The third biggest issue was about inappropriately parked vehicles. PCSOs were collating information; vehicle details were taken. He welcomed a discussion with Councillors about specific areas.

Councillor Collett referred to a group she had seen called 'Restorative Justice'. She had found this to have been a productive day. The group went into schools and got children to take responsibility and mentor others. It brought different groups together.

Inspector Dent invited Members to join her team on a 'Night-time Economy walk through'. Another one would be held in November. Members would be given a presentation at the Police Station and then a walk through the town where they would be able to talk to the different groups involved in the evening.

Liam Fitzgerald stated that Members were invited to attend the Anti-social Behaviour Action Group. The Group met the last Monday of every month at the Town Hall starting at 10.30 a.m.

The Committee and Scrutiny Officer thanked the Partnership's representatives for attending the meeting and answering the Task Group's questions.

3

WORK PROGRAMME

The Task Group considered the scrutiny proposal suggested by Councillor McLeod. The Committee and Scrutiny Officer advised that the suggestion had been forwarded to the Task Group by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee. It had been suggested that if the Task Group were to undertake the review it might wish to expand it to include other businesses in Watford and not just the Council.

Councillor Martins responded that the Head of Human Resources' comments had not been very helpful and he considered them to be against the Equal Opportunities Policy.

Councillor McLeod said that she was also concerned about the risk of ex-offender's becoming homeless. The Council did not appear to have a policy

Councillor Martins cautioned about the scope of the review.

The Committee and Scrutiny Officer suggested that Councillor McLeod could adjust the proposal and then it could be considered for review.

Councillor Khan suggested that statistics needed to be considered by the Task Group. Members could then consider whether the Community Safety Partnership was dealing with the causes.

Councillor McLeod advised that during 2010/11 the Task Group had regularly seen the crime statistics. Members had asked for the statistics to be broken down further and for details of where people came from. The Task Group would

also need to monitor the impact cutbacks had on the community. She asked that the 2010/11 statistics and the latest information for 2011/12 be made available at the next meeting. Members also wanted advice on how to interpret the statistics.

Councillor Meerabux asked whether it would be possible to call in Accident and Emergency. Councillor McLeod advised that she was aware the Primary Care Trust (PCT) was monitoring A and E. She said that the PCT could be asked for the statistics available, including a breakdown.

Councillor Lynch stated that she was concerned about the closure of the accommodation which was operated by Stonham and the state of the YMCA.

Councillor McLeod asked Councillor Lynch to complete the scrutiny proposal forms with her suggestions and then to return them to the Committee and Scrutiny Officer.

4 DATE OF NEXT MEETING

It was agreed that the next meeting would be held on Tuesday 6 December 2011, starting at 6.30 p.m.

Chair

The Meeting started at 6.30 pm
and finished at 8.15 pm