

**MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF SCRUTINY
HELD AT FOLLATON HOUSE, TOTNES ON WEDNESDAY 16 DECEMBER 2009**

MEMBERS

ø Cllr C M Pannell - Chairman

* Cllr K J Baldry - Vice-Chairman

* Cllr J H Baverstock

* Cllr R D Gilbert

* Cllr P H Cook

* Cllr J W Squire

* Cllr G J Fielden

* Cllr J A Westacott MBE

* Denotes attendance

ø Denotes apology for absence

Also in attendance and participating:

Cllrs M J Hicks, M F Saltern and R J Tucker

Officers in attendance:

For all items: Strategic Director (Resources), Member Support Services Manager and Member Support Officer;

Items 7 and 8: (Minutes SC.41/09 & SC.42/09 below refer) Senior Community Safety Officer, Community Safety and Emergency Planning Officer, Superintendent Sharpe and Head of Environmental Health; and

Item 9: (Minute SC.43/09 below refers) Head of ICT Services.

SC.39/09 MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting of Scrutiny held on 19 November 2009 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

SC.40/09 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Members were invited to declare any interests in the items of business to be considered during the course of the meeting.

Cllr J H Baverstock declared a personal interest in Item 7: 'Policing Matters in the South Hams' (Minute SC.41/09 below refers) by virtue of his previous employment with the Police and remained in the meeting and took part in the discussion and vote on this item.

Cllr G J Fielden declared a personal interest in Item 8: 'South Devon and Dartmoor Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnership' (Minute SC.42/09 below refers) by virtue of his being the South Hams District Council Member representative on the Partnership.

SC.41/09 POLICING MATTERS IN THE SOUTH HAMS

The Superintendent thanked the Group for the invitation to attend and the opportunity to discuss local policing issues. She then tabled some documents in relation to local performance statistics.

The Superintendent stated that confidence in the Police and the local authority was exceptionally high, which would provide a good platform for the joint pledge to deliver services according to community need.

In terms of customer satisfaction, vehicle crime currently presented the biggest challenge. In addition, whilst there had been pleasing reductions in reported crime, she did recognise that there were some ongoing issues related to unreported crime.

During the discussion, the following issues were raised:

Consultation on Anti-Social Behaviour:

It was noted that less than 40% of residents felt they were consulted about anti-social behaviour and crime issues in their area. In response, the Group was informed that more work was required on engagement and that processes to improve performance were still being formulated. In his experience, a Member stated that residents felt they were over consulted by a variety of agencies in relation to crime. The need for a more focused and co-ordinated approach to consultation between the relevant agencies (e.g. by using the South Hams magazine) was therefore emphasised.

Charging for Events and Remembrance Day Parades:

The Group was informed that Association of Chief Police Officer (ACPO) guidance on charging was that where an event was not for profit, no charges should be made. In the case of Dartmouth Regatta, there was clearly a commercial benefit and hence, a charge was levied and the huge number of people attending necessitated a high level of policing and traffic management. With regard to Remembrance Day Parades, the Police could not guarantee resources (i.e. that officers would not be called to attend an incident elsewhere) and therefore road closures were recommended for busy stretches of highway.

Devon & Cornwall Constabulary – Local Policing Summary 2009/10:

Due to a postcode mix up by the Royal Mail, it was noted that the wrong version of the summary had been mailed out to households and that locally the version for the Isles of Scilly had been received. To rectify this matter, the summary had gone back to print for recirculation in the next few weeks.

Forward Planning:

A Member stated that they had found the comments of a local Inspector reported in the press with regard to forward planning inappropriate and that there were more appropriate avenues, such as the Local Strategic Partnership to make representations. In response, the Superintendent informed that there was nothing inaccurate in the comments though the context in which they had been reported was unhelpful. However, she acknowledged that it had not been helpful to good working relations.

Policing in Dartmouth:

The Group was informed that in 2008, the Chief Constable had pledged to return 200 officers to front line policing across the force. This figure had been exceeded by 40 officers. However, for a short while during the transition process there had been a gap in local resources but new transferees had filled vacant posts and now all stations were up to strength. However, in light of the future budget savings the force would be required to make, and with local affordable housing issues, she did anticipate that when posts became vacant again it would be a challenge to fill them in Dartmouth as officers typically looked to transfer to Plymouth as soon as their two year tenure had expired to reduce their commuting times. Also, when officers had been lost, it was likely to be difficult to make a business case to replace them due to the low incidents of crime.

The Superintendent welcomed the input and support from the Group with regard to utilising Ministry of Defence properties for key workers.

Town and Parish Council Meetings:

A Member stated that community reassurance would be improved by the presence of a Police Officer or Police Community Support Officer to report to Town and Parish Council meetings and asked if it was possible for a rota system to be implemented to ensure that each council had such a presence on a regular or quarterly basis. In response, the Group was informed that the Police did try to ensure this happened but that the high number of town and parish councils in the South Hams placed a burden on resources. However, as part of the 'confidence programme' officers were being encouraged to engage with the public on foot patrol during every shift.

It was then:-

RESOLVED

That the Group:-

1. expresses its concern at the statistic that less than 40% of local residents do not feel they are adequately consulted by the Police about their views;
2. would welcome a more co-ordinated approach to consultation;
3. wish for a letter to be sent on behalf of the Authority to local MP's with regard to using Ministry of Defence properties to house key workers in the South Hams;
4. request that wherever possible, Police representatives be sent to Town and Parish Council meetings on a quarterly basis.

SC.42/09

**SOUTH DEVON AND DARTMOOR CRIME AND DISORDER
REDUCTION PARTNERSHIP**

The Senior Community Safety Officer gave a presentation which set out the Terms of Reference of the Partnership, the background of National Guidance and details of their funding plan and expenditure. Members were also reminded of Section 17 of the Crime and Disorder Act 1998 which placed a statutory duty on councils to work with partners to reduce Crime and Disorder whereas historically this had been the sole responsibility of the Police. The Officer noted that legislation continually updated their duties, and from April 2010, the Partnership would also be required to address reducing reoffending. The Officer highlighted the future role of the Scrutiny Group which would be as the 'Critical Friend' of the Partnership, providing constructive challenge at a strategic level through its statutory requirement to scrutinise the Partnership on an annual basis.

During discussion, the following issues were highlighted:-

Unreported Crime in Rural Areas:

Concern was raised that low crime statistics may not have factored in unreported crime, particularly in rural areas such as sheep rustling and theft from farms. In response, Superintendent Sharpe stated that there was a direct link with confidence in the Police and increased reporting of crime. Unreported rural crime was recognised as an issue and the Officer stated that it was very important that all crime was reported in order for them to detect cumulative patterns of behaviour, individual modus operandi and emerging trends.

With particular regard to incidents of sheep rustling, the Superintendent again highlighted the importance of reporting these matters, as to date only one incidence had been logged. The Senior Community Safety Officer informed that she would be attending farmer's forums and the Dartmoor National Park Authority and that she intended to highlight these issues.

Crown Prosecution Service:

It was noted that in the introductory presentation, there was no mention of the prosecution of offenders as a means of crime prevention (i.e. in terms of issuing cautions) and it was suggested that the Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) should be represented on the Partnership.

In response, the Senior Community Safety Officer informed that the Partnership was not reticent in taking enforcement action when necessary and as a result did have a strong relationship with the CPS who now approached the Partnership with regard to prosecuting individuals. The Officer advised that she also sat on the local Criminal Justice Board, which invited Magistrates and Chairs of Benches to their meetings to ensure their priorities were current. The Superintendent informed that a lot of work was currently being undertaken with regard to restorative justice whereby offenders were confronted with the impact of their crimes on victims. This work often had a big impact on offenders and was an alternative to the court process.

Victim Follow Up Contact:

A Member stated that confidence and reassurance was also provided by follow up contact for victims, and that this element of policing required more attention as a lack of follow up contact created the perception that nothing was being done by the police in relation to reported crimes. In response, the Superintendent acknowledged that this was a weak area for the force and work was being undertaken to improve this aspect.

Anti-Social Use of Vehicles (including Speeding):

It was discussed that speeding was a big issue in rural consultations and that it was not solely young drivers who were responsible, although they were more likely to be involved in fatal accidents. Commuter 'rat runs' were also a significant cause of speeding in rural areas. The Group was informed that letters were sent to offending drivers and there was also a project being undertaken with driving instructors to impart safer driving messages to young drivers during their driving lessons. The lessons provided an opportunity for structured input to bring about sustainable good driving.

Funding of the Crime and Disorder Partnership:

The Group was advised that the authority had a statutory duty to resource the obligation for crime and disorder reduction, though not necessarily through an officer. The Leader of the Council asked the Officer when the new duties became obligatory, such as for reducing re-offending, who would be responsible for supplying the funding, and would all partners be making a financial contribution. He further asked if the Partnership was striving to find the similar scale (20%) of cuts and efficiencies which other areas of the public sector were tasked. In response, the Group was informed that partners provided staff time for the CDRP but that all agencies contributed to the Devon Safer Partnership funding.

It was also noted that when the CDRPs merged to form the South Devon and Dartmoor CDRP, staff numbers had been reduced considerably and the financial saving had been the driver for the merger, so efficiency savings had already been made. Members and Senior Officers reiterated their point that responsibilities were continually being ascribed to local authorities without accompanying funding to undertake them.

The Council Member representative on the Partnership stated that it had been operating effectively, which was reflected by the crime statistics. However, he would be closely monitoring the budget, but stated that he would not support any cuts which he deemed to be excessive.

Young People and Crime:

It was commented that insufficient reference had been made to young people and crime prevention in the Section 17 document that had been compiled. In response, the Community Safety Officer stated that a lot of work had been undertaken to provide diversionary activities for young people, such as BMX, skate parks and Multi Use Games Areas.

It was then:-

RESOLVED

That the Group:

1. welcome the Children and Young People's initiatives in the South Devon and Dartmoor Local Delivery Plan 2009/10;
2. would like to see the Crown Prosecution Service invited to be a partner in the Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnership;
3. wishes to see increased follow up support given to victims of crime;
4. expresses its major concerns with regard to the funding and value for money of the Partnership, especially when considering the increased obligations being passed down by Central Government;
5. wishes, in the current economic climate, for the partnership to continually look to make efficiency savings;
6. thanks the Senior Community Safety Officer for an excellent presentation.

SC.43/09 ICT SERVICE REVIEW

The Head of ICT informed Members that the presented report had been slightly updated from when it had been presented on 23 April 2009 (Minute SC.65/08 refers). She highlighted to the Group that no Budget Bids had been submitted by the service in the last five years.

In discussion, the following issues were raised:-

Benchmarking:

The Officer informed that the Local Government Review had affected involvement in benchmarking and currently there were only two organisations that they were able to be compared with, but that this was still useful. In the absence of a greater number of organisations, Members welcomed any opportunity for comparative benchmarking though still did not feel in a position to make informed decisions to be able to scrutinise the service adequately.

Pressures on the Service:

It was considered that some of the workloads placed upon the service were excessive. In response, the Leader of the Council stated that the demands on the service were managed by the Strategic Management Team, and workloads were often determined by the limitations of revenue.

ICT Business Support Manager:

The Officer informed that this post was specifically responsible for new business requirements, ensuring contract supply negotiation processes were adhered to, project management and supporting new infrastructure.

It was then

RESOLVED

That the report be noted and comparative benchmarking for the service be awaited.

SC.44/09 **SCRUTINY SHADOWING ROLES**

The Members informed that generally they were kept fully briefed by their Executive colleagues, and in most instances, continued to meet frequently.

SC.45/09 **FUTURE AGENDA ITEMS**

The current future agenda was agreed as presented to the meeting.

(NOTE: Since this meeting, the Joint Informal Scrutiny Group meeting with West Devon Borough Council that had been scheduled to take place on Friday 8 January 2010 to further discuss the Serious Case Review Process in Devon, had been cancelled).

(Meeting commenced at 10.00 am and concluded at 12.55 pm).

Chairman