

Lancashire County Council

Scrutiny Committee

Minutes of the Meeting held on Friday, 4th March, 2011 at 10.00 am in Cabinet Room 'B' - County Hall, Preston

Present:

County Councillor John Shedwick (Chair)

County Councillors

K Ellard	P Malpas
S Chapman	D O'Toole
Mrs F Craig-Wilson	Mrs L Oades
C Crompton	P Steen
M Devaney	D Westley
Mrs J Hanson	B Winlow

1. Disclosure of Personal and Prejudicial Interests

County Councillor P Steen declared a personal interest in item 4 – Safer Lancashire as the Chair of the Rossendale Community Safety Partnership.

County Councillor S Chapman declared a personal interest in Item 4 – Safer Lancashire as a Director of the Lancashire Partnership Against Crime (LANPAC).

2. Minutes of the Meeting held on 11 February 2011

Resolved: That the minutes of the meeting held on 11 January 2011 be confirmed and signed by the chair.

3. Safer Lancashire

Safer Lancashire

The Chair welcomed Colleen Martin, Community Safety Manager, Lancashire County Council; Miranda Carruthers-Watt, Chief Executive, Lancashire Police Authority; and Assistant Chief Constable Stuart Williams, Lancashire Constabulary, to the meeting.

Colleen Martin gave a brief introductory summary, noting that the Safer Lancashire Board (SLB) is a pan-Lancashire body, including areas covered by Blackpool and Blackburn with Darwen councils. Its role was to co-ordinate and enhance the activity of local Community Safety Partnerships, meaning that whilst this local level activity was important, it was not the subject of the report under consideration.

The principle aim of the paper was to look forward and seek member's views on the forward plan and future priorities, and to develop the action plan.

The committee were advised that the SLB had taken a different approach to developing its priorities, identifying four themes, rather than specific crime types. These themes were deliberately broad to capture as much mainstream activity from all of the partners as possible.

The themes identified were:

- Reduce Alcohol and drug misuse
- Reduce reoffending
- Change attitudes and behaviours
- Protect and Support vulnerable people

It was hoped that this would help focus funding and engage a wider range of public and third sector organisations in recognising their contribution to the issues.

A question was asked on priority-setting and whether it made sense for the SLB to publish a list of priorities as long as 28 items, grouped under 4 themes. Members commented that, in practice, this might instead give the impression that the SLB did not actually have a clear sense of what its priorities were.

A brief summary of performance was provided, noting that the position in Lancashire was generally good, and the county remains a low crime area.

The committee identified some key areas for questioning: Alcohol and Drug misuse; Domestic Violence; Anti Social Behaviour; PCSOs; reoffending

Alcohol and drug misuse

Members commented that there are a wide number of agencies who have been involved in addressing alcohol and drug problems, and queried how duplication of effort and dispersal of funding could be avoided. It was explained that an Alcohol Harm Reduction Strategy had been drawn up with all of the major partners to deal with this issue, whilst each concentrated on its core function.

In response to a query about action taken in areas where it is known that drugs are being sold, ACC Williams advised that action is taken, and figures could be provided if required. However, the issue with drugs was only partly to do with enforcement action and that education and prevention work by partners was crucial.

It was highlighted that much alcohol misuse happens within the home, with young people either obtaining alcohol from home to drink on the streets or getting drunk before going out. The committee were advised that work was ongoing with Trading Standards and the Young Peoples Service to address this, particularly focussing on changing parental attitudes. It was recognised that alcohol misuse

was closely linked to wider dysfunctionality, and that the council's "Total Family" approach would have an impact.

Attention was drawn to the potential for councils to use licensing legislation to tackle the issue, and that this was something that featured strongly in the proposed legislation.

In response to concerns raised about dealing with alcohol abuse in prisons, the committee were advised that a short sentence pilot was underway in Preston, in an attempt to deal with "revolving door" offenders by involving those agencies who provide support outside of prison during an offender's sentence.

Domestic Abuse

The committee queried provision for male victims of domestic violence. It was confirmed that, whilst many refuges are specifically designed for women. Services were available to men. The example of the Preston Women's Refuge was highlighted, as an organisation that, whilst not providing refuge accommodation, did offer services.

On funding for Domestic Violence services, it was noted that there was a complex funding picture, and that confirmation was awaited on Supporting People funding, a bid made by the SLB and a number of individual bids from refuges and other service providers.

Anti Social Behaviour

The committee raised the concern that the reduction in the figures could be due to under-reporting caused by a view that the matter will not be taken seriously and won't be dealt with. In response, it was highlighted that tackling ASB did not solely depend on reports, but also on proactive neighbourhood policing. The figures indicated that ASB had reduced for the past two years, and that there was 20% less criminal damage than last year. Several members, however, spoke of examples of non-reporting and felt this was a real challenge.

The role of PCSOs was considered by the committee. Some members felt that it would be appropriate for PCSOs to be given more powers. It was confirmed that the Chief Constable and the Constabulary opposed this view, and were keen to highlight that PCSOs and police officers were different but complementary jobs. There could be a danger in PCSOs being seen as simply cheap police officers, which was not the approach supported by the police in Lancashire. It was noted that PCSOs in Lancashire had the minimum powers allowed in statute, and several members, whilst acknowledging the position of the police, felt that further powers being granted would not compromise the constabulary.

The committee heard that tackling ASB was not simply a question of enforcement by police, but involved a range of different bodies, and, importantly, communities themselves. Tackling ASB required enforcement, but also education and

engineering. ASB was managed as a sub group of the SLB, with all members signed up to a set of minimum standards.

Members raised the issue of illegally parked cars as an example of ASB. It was noted that this was now the responsibility of the council since decriminalisation, and that these views would be fed back to those responsible for the service.

Reoffending

The committee were advised that the Police Authority had received several reports on the effectiveness of restorative justice initiatives. Indications were that this was a very beneficial approach, with high visibility for the community and for keeping offenders out of the criminal justice system. There were some not in favour of the approach, notably in the judiciary, although generally the pilot schemes had demonstrated a positive effect. The committee also supported Community Payback schemes, where offenders carried out work in the community.

It was noted that national figures indicated that 64% of people ASBOs reoffend. Figures for Lancashire were not available, but would be provided after the meeting. It was agreed that reoffending rates were high, but that this included small "technical" breaches as well as more serious ones. Responses need to be appropriate. The Constabulary continued to support their use as one method of dealing with crime and disorder. It was noted that Lancashire has significantly fewer ASBOs than other parts of the country.

Integrated Offender management remained a priority for the SLB, noting that there was a need to have provision for offenders facing short prison sentences to prevent them becoming "revolving door" offenders.

Resolved: That

- i. The refresh of the Strategic Assessment and the areas of focus identified by the Safer Lancashire Board for 2011-14 were noted
- ii. The comments made by the committee above are noted by the Safer Lancashire Board in delivering the current Community Safety Agreement.

4. Task Group Updates

The Committee received an update on current task groups and their proposed completion dates.

Resolved: That the update on existing task groups be noted.

5. Recent and Forthcoming Decisions

The committee considered recent relevant decisions made and also forthcoming decisions including those set out in the current Forward Plan.

Resolved: That the report be noted.

6. Workplan 2010/11

The workplan for the committee was presented for noting and comments.

Resolved: That the report be noted.

7. Date of Next Meeting

It was noted that the next meeting of the committee will be held on Friday 8 April at 10am at County Hall, Preston.

I M Fisher
County Secretary and Solicitor

County Hall
Preston