

TORRIDGE DISTRICT COUNCIL

EXTERNAL OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY MEETING

Barum Room - Brynsworthy

Thursday, 30 November 2023 - 10.00 am

PRESENT Councillor C Cottle-Hunkin (Chair)

Councillors L Bach, J Craigie, S Harding, C Hawkins, D Smith,
H Thomas and P Hackett

ALSO PRESENT P Gilbert - Public Health & Community Safety
Manager
M Millichope - Community Safety & Environmental
Protection Team Leader
I Mclver - Neighbourhood Officer
K Hewlett - Electoral and Democratic Services Officer

223. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Annie Brenton, Councillor Shepherd and the Head of Legal and Governance (& Monitoring Officer).

224. CONFIRMATION OF MINUTES

It was proposed by Councillor Cottle-Hunkin, seconded by Councillor Harding and –

Resolved:

That the minutes of the meeting held on Wednesday 01 November 2023 be agreed and signed as a correct record.

(Vote: For 6, Abstentions 1)

225. ACTION LIST

Members agreed to defer the item to the following meeting.

226. DECLARATION OF INTERESTS

Members were reminded that declarations of interest should be made as and when the specific agenda item to which they related was under discussion.

227. AGREEMENT OF AGENDA ITEMS PART I AND II

There were no Part II items.

228. URGENT MATTERS BROUGHT FORWARD WITH THE PERMISSION OF THE CHAIR

Chair raised the re-opening of the consultation on proposed closure of the Link Centres for Bideford, Barnstaple and Ilfracombe. A letter was then read to Committee members on behalf of Councillor Annie Brenton, this was in relation to a recent meeting on the Link Centre proposals with Devon County Council and Councillor McInnes.

Members were advised that the Consultation was open until Wednesday 6th December 2023 and a final decision was due on 9th February 2024.

There was discussion regarding the impact of the closures and members were urged to respond with their own representations.

229. CONSIDERATION OF THE FORWARD PLAN

Members agreed to defer the item to the following meeting.

230. UPDATE ON THE NORTH DEVON AND TORRIDGE COMMUNITY SAFETY PARTNERSHIP

Members of the North Devon Council Crime and Disorder Sub-Committee, and Torrridge District Council's External Overview and Scrutiny Committee were present for the update.

Superintendent Toby Davies introduced himself as the current Chair of the Community Safety Partnership.

Members were also introduced to: Kevin Connar (Community Safety Sergeant), Inspector Andrew Wills (Barnstaple Town Inspector), Chief Inspector Graham Thomas (North and West Devon Chief Inspector), and Inspector Richard Preston (North Devon and Ilfracombe Inspector).

Superintendent Davies gave a brief detail of the background to the role of the Community Safety Partnership (CSP) and confirmed that there was a legal requirement for the partners to work together with regard to domestic, homicidal review, suicide (off the back of domestic abuse) and knife crime.

Superintendent Davies noted that the majority of officers involved in the CSP had been appointed since the previous meeting (of November 2022), and that this CSP was the only one within the Devon area which was chaired by police personnel. He would be 'sitting back' from his position as Chair but would still be involved with the CSP.

Superintendent Davies highlighted the main areas of focus – these were confirmed as:

- Serious violence (including violence against women and girls)
- Safer Streets (including anti-social behaviour (ASB))
- Emerging Threats (including Hate Crime)

The main points highlighted were as follows:

- The Devon and Cornwall area remained one of the safest.
- Anti-social behaviour had reduced by 17%
- The area was, in the majority, rural, which gave a greater sense of isolation and vulnerability among its residents.
- Local threats were most likely 'hidden from view' in the form of domestic violence.
- Project 'Night time' was looking to tackle problems caused by the night-time economy.
- The success of the recently-introduced 'night-bus' service between Bideford and Barnstaple.
- Street Marshalls
- County Lines / Cuckoo-ing / drug dealing networks.
- 'Ask for Angela' campaign – and other campaigns within the licensing trade – eg identifying vulnerable customers, anti-drink spiking campaigns.
- the CSP area was responsible for sharing the highest amount of Partnership Intelligence through to Devon & Cornwall Police.

Superintendent Davies advised that:

- the Safer Streets initiative had helped to reduce crime although the main benefit was the improvement in visible behaviour, and the reduction of the public feeling unsafe in the towns.
- Joint patrols had taken place.
- There had been an increase in the number of Community protection notices being issued.
- ASB House closures had been issued where properties had been linked to drug supply.
- A tailored-approach to working with the individuals causing the most issues: identifying those people and assigning case-workers to help them.
- Tackling Hate Crimes would be given a higher priority.
- The Police were interested in the possibility of utilising 'hubs' within Bideford and Barnstaple. NDC were consulting on the possible creation of a community hub in Green Lanes, Barnstaple, and TDC were considering using office space at Jubilee Square, Bideford.

The Public Health and Community Safety Manager (TDC) advised the Sub-committee that:

- PSPOs for alcohol and ASB had been issued by the neighbourhood safety teams. Approximately 30 orders had been issued.
- To assist with the PSPO enforcement TDC had been looking at utilizing office space on Jubilee Square.

- CCTV operation would be included within the remit of the TDC community safety team.
- A small budget had been made available for the provision of Street Marshalls in Bideford over the Christmas period.

The CCTV, Town Centre and Pannier Market Manager (NDC) addressed the Committee and reconfirmed the importance of a partnership approach in delivering the Safer Streets initiative. The Safer Streets funding had now ended. She also confirmed that:

- Additional cameras had been installed around ASB hotspots. This included Maiden Street, Barnstaple.
- Street-Marshalls, intelligence groups, and the presence of uniformed 'officers' (not necessarily Police) had assisted in tackling complex ASB cases.
- An additional High-Flow worker had been employed to assist with those cases.
- Pro-active works had taken place to help reduce violence against women and girls. This had included visits by officers to schools, additional training and support to those in the night-time economy, self-defence training, workshops and training with Taxi-drivers, and mystery-shopper exercises.
- Pro-active works to 'reclaim' public spaces (such as Paternoster Row, Barnstaple) had made areas feel safer; removing unwelcome behaviours had changed the feel of the area.
- The Licensing team had undertaken a project with Soroptomists International (Barnstaple and District) in an Anti-drink-spiking campaign.

In response to a question from the Committee, the CCTV, Town Centre and Pannier Market Manager confirmed that additional powers had been delegated to officers to deal with problems they encountered. This enabled those working in the coastal areas (not just in the towns) to deal with issues such as under-age drinking, the safety of those drinking on beaches/near water.

Superintendent Davies confirmed that:

- Patrols would take place around areas where known under-age drinking took place. This would be monitored around the time of the end of the exams and the dates for each school/college would be used to create a timetabled, co-ordinated response.
- A pro-active approach with schools and youth groups was required and would focus on prevention and teaching. This was hoped to help reduce knife crime, and those carrying weapons. These were not problems just encountered in cities. The CSP held regular meetings where intelligence was shared on this issue. CCTV operators were skilled in identifying potential problems.

Inspector Andrew Wills addressed the Committee and advised, in respect of crime-reporting:

- Abandoned calls to the 101 line had reduced by 40% since the introduction of the 'call-back' service.
- We are recording more crime incidents than we were 12 months ago.
- Overall the number of incidents reported across the region have fallen by 3.7% in the past 12 months.
- Incidences of ASB had reduced by 17.3%
- 32.7% of those were in Barnstaple town centre.

In response to a question from the Committee, Superintendent Davies confirmed that the Night-bus service between Bideford and Barnstaple was a trial service. 600 tickets had been sold to date. The intention was to increase the trial and expand the route to include Ilfracombe. This service was beneficial to all although to continue the service alternative funding would be required.

Inspector Andrew Wills emphasised the need to ensure Stage Coach were made aware of how valuable this service was.

Cllr Cottle-Hunkin confirmed that TDC's External O&S committee had recently contacted Stage Coach, and would make sure the importance of the night bus was included in their correspondence and specifically the potential to extend it to towns such as Torrington and Ilfracombe.

In response to questions, Superintendent Davies advised that should further CCTV cameras be required in an area then the capital would be required for the initial purchase and installation, but that in most cases those cameras could be added to the existing CCTV system and be monitored.

(11:15 Cllr Biederman left the meeting).

Chief Inspector Graham Thomas confirmed that Operation Loki (involving TDC Officers and the Police) had been successful in reducing ASB in Westward Ho! over the summer although within the same period there had been a slight increase in Bideford.

Superintendent Davies advised that there needed to be a good provision of youth-clubs and activities but that there were gaps appearing in youth-provision.

The Chairs, and Committee members, thanked Inspector Davies and his team for their work on the Community Safety Partnership (CSP) and noted that there was a heavy reliance on the community sector to ensure the work continued.

The Chair of the TDC External Overview and Scrutiny Committee, Cllr Cottle-Hunkin, noted that the closure by Devon County Council (DCC) of the local Link Centres could impact resources as those with mental health issues may not receive the support they required. She noted that the knock-on results of this could be severe.

Superintendent Davies advised that DCC were part of the CSP and the police would be in contact with DCC about the closures, although it was not a police

matter. He noted that the D&C Police had responded to the public consultation and urged TDC and NDC to do the same if they had not yet done so.

In response to a question from the Committee, Superintendent Davies advised that the Police and Crime Commissioner (Alison Hernandez) had been a supporter of the Northern Devon area and an advocate of the Street Marshall scheme, although it was likely that she did not feel that the police force should be responsible for funding it. Local Authorities could look to provide funding from their budgets if it was felt to be a priority. Street Marshalls did not perform a policing role, but were community roles. The number of PCSOs had increased across the two districts. This would enhance the community work of the Marshalls. There were economic benefits to be had from making areas more attractive to the public.

(11:39 Cllr Craigie left the meeting)

The Chief Executive of NDC confirmed that NDC had allocated funding for the Street Marshall scheme, and that despite his initial reluctance he had found the results of the scheme to be startling. The benefits of the Marshalls in aiding the improvement of overall safety of public areas. He confirmed that NDC would continue to support the scheme for as long as possible. NDC had seen a drop in vandalism (eg in toilets) and helped the authority to be a 'curator of place' and develop the area to be welcoming. This was beneficial as part of the works undertaken on the Future High Streets project. There would be little point in developing an area if the public felt unsafe in visiting. NDC were considering extending the Street Marshall scheme to Ilfracombe.

The Public Health and Community Safety Manager (TDC) confirmed that Street Marshalls would be in operation in Bideford over Christmas.

(11:50 Cllr Hawkins left the meeting).

The Chair (TDC) discussed the provision of 'Bite-size' training sessions from the Police.

The Community Safety Sergeant confirmed that he would contact the two Chairs in relation to identifying the specific training need.

The meeting commenced at 10.01 am and closed at 11.57 am

Chair:

Date: