



MINUTES OF THE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Tuesday 6 January 2015 at 7.00 pm

PRESENT: Councillor A Choudry (Chair), Councillor Colwill (Vice-Chair) and Councillors Allie, Daly, Shahzad and Southwood, together with Mr Alloysius Frederick

Also Present: Councillors Butt (Leader of the Council), Chohan, Denselow (Lead Member for Stronger Communities), Filson, Mahmood and Pavey (Deputy Leader of the Council)

Apologies were received from: Councillors W Mitchell Murray and Oladapo, Co-opted Member Dr J Levison and appointed observer Lesley Gouldbourne

1. Declarations of interests

None declared.

2. Minutes of the previous meeting

RESOLVED:-

that the minutes of the previous meeting held on 26 November 2014 be approved as an accurate record of the meeting.

3. Matters arising

None.

4. Safer Brent Partnership Annual Report 2013 - 2014

Chris Williams (Head of Community Safety and Emergency Planning, Environment and Neighbourhoods) gave a presentation on the Safer Brent Partnership (SBP) that comprised of the council, Metropolitan Police, London Fire Brigade, National Probation Service, Community Rehabilitation Company and NHS Brent Clinical Commissioning Group. Chris Williams advised that the six priorities for the SBP strategy for 2013 – 2014 were:

- Reducing crime
- Reducing violence against women and girls
- Reducing anti-social behaviour
- Reducing the use and misuse of drugs and alcohol
- Preventing and reducing youth offending and reoffending
- Increasing confidence and satisfaction.

Chris Williams then referred to some of the success of the SBP's work in 2013-14, including a reduction in robbery and burglary of 23% and having one of the highest

performing partnerships on substance misuse in London. A successful 'gang call-in' in South Kilburn that involved engaging with the most problematic gang members had led to zero offences in this area since May 2014, whilst the Home Office had identified the SBP's work on gangs as a 'success story'. The SBP had also developed an increasingly successful Prevent Strategy to build resilience within the community against the threat of radicalisation. Members heard that there were also a number of initiatives that had been developed in 2013-14, including the establishment of a new Integrated Offender Management partnership, the commissioning of new domestic violence services and the development of new risk based models for anti-social behaviour to manage prolific offending and protect the most vulnerable victims. In addition, an innovative prostitution project had been commissioned to help sex workers exit from this lifestyle, whilst a Safer Neighbourhood Board had been established to hold the police to account for its performance by the public.

In respect of trends in Brent, Chris Williams advised that whilst crime overall was reducing, violence involving injury was increasing, as it was across London as a whole. The committee heard that town centres in the borough continued to be crime hotspots and Brent was a significant national gang hotspot, with many of its gangs operating all over the country. Domestic incidents were also on the increase, although there had not been a corresponding increase in reported domestic violence which was markedly more prevalent in the south of the borough. Chris Williams then informed members of the agreed priorities of the SBP for 2014-17, these being:

- Violence against women and girls
- Gang related offending
- Anti-social behaviour
- Reducing reoffending

Chief Superintendent (Ch Supt) Mick Gallagher (Brent Borough Commander, Brent Metropolitan Police) then addressed the committee. Ch Supt Mick Gallagher advised that there were a number of 'hotspots' underpinning incidents of domestic abuse and invariably these were located in areas of high deprivation. The population in the borough was changing and had brought about increases in reports of domestic abuse in some areas, such as Kilburn. Members heard that domestic abuse across London was increasing and often women did not report abuse until it had happened on a number of occasions. However, reported domestic abuse in the borough had fallen in the last three months. Ch Supt Mick Gallagher commented that no particular population group had been associated with higher rates of domestic abuse and the SBP was working hard with other agencies in helping victims, whilst also focusing on the perpetrators. Members heard that the risks to women in terms of repeat offending had not changed in the last six months. In terms of reporting domestic abuse, Ch Mick Gallagher stated that an uplift in confidence of victims can lead to an increase in reporting of abuse.

Ch Supt Mick Gallagher advised that of the top 30 wards recording the highest incidents of street violence in London, two were in Brent, these being Harlesden and Stonebridge. Additional resources had been allocated to tackle street violence in these two wards, including extra police and more stop and searches. Ch Supt Mick Gallagher acknowledged that there had needed to be improvements in respect of the police's approach to licensing and a new licensing strategy was in place that

took a more robust approach, with thorough visits to licensed premises taking place and comprehensive feedback provided, including to the council's licensing officers. In addition, members heard that the police were focusing on off-licences as well as bars that were situated near Wembley Stadium and Wembley Arena, as these too contributed to higher alcohol consumption on event days.

During members' discussions, the committee enquired whether Brent compared well to other boroughs in tackling crime over the past twelve months and what were the main areas of concern. A member asked whether the SBP was happy in terms of the police's engagement with the different groups in the community and he asked why the Leader of the Council was not the chair of the SBP. He also asked if stop and search was an SBP priority and sought an explanation as to why the increase in reported incidents was not leading to a corresponding rise in reported offences. A member asked if more information was available comparing crime numbers with previous years and breaking these figures down by area. She commented that public safety in the borough was a big issues, especially for women, and that within the community the relationship with the police was seen by some was not seen as strong, whilst the perception of the level of crime was also high. In respect of the SBP's priorities for 2013-14, she enquired whether a needs assessment had been undertaken and was there a budget available to undertake this. It was remarked that paan spitting was an issue, particularly in the north of the borough and it was asked what steps were currently being taken to address this and why was not more being done considering the perception of the public was that this matter was getting worse. In respect of the borough wide controlled drinking zone, it was commented that there was often little police presence when late night street drinking occurred and this was a major public safety issue. A member stated that there was a reduced police presence in the Gladstone Park area where there was often crime, possibly due to a 'blind spot' and more information for crime figures in this area was requested.

A member sought observations on the effectiveness of information sharing between the organisations in the SBP. In addition, given the financial pressures faced by all public services, were there concerns about plugging shortfalls and what were the main perceived risks to the effectiveness of the SBP. It was enquired whether the SBP felt it was getting the appropriate support from the community. A member asked what was the estimated proportion of juveniles in the borough who were gang members. A member in noting that focus was given to the top ten perpetrators of domestic violence, commented that she hoped efforts were also made to address a wider number of perpetrators. It was asked whether some groups did not feel sufficiently empowered to ask for help. The committee asked if any lessons had been learnt in the recent 'Week of Action' initiative and was it felt that the relationship between the police and the council was now stronger.

With the approval of the Chair, Councillor Mahmood addressed the committee. Councillor Mahmood asked whether there were any stop and search figures that were attributable to the Prevent Strategy.

In reply to the issues raised, Chris Williams felt that the SBP had laid solid foundations for more effective operating between the partner organisations and it was now better placed to bring offenders to justice and there was a stronger evidence base to tackle issues. Amongst the areas of concern were the incidences of violence with injury which was partly attributable to gang related violence and to

activity during the night time economy. Chris Williams acknowledged that the SBP needed to work harder to gain a better understanding of the broader reasons behind the increase in violence with injury incidents, such as the importance of educational outcomes, reducing inequalities and looking at licenced premises. Members heard that visual indicators, such as fly tipping and graffiti, can affect the perception of residents and make them feel less secure and there was a need to improve the environment. Chris Williams advised that there was a monitoring group consisting of lay members of the public that oversaw stop and search. The stop and search statistics were mapped to help the SBP identify the key themes that were driving crime and stop and search was one of the numerous tools police had to address crime.

Chris Williams advised that there was a requirement for the SBP to undertake an annual needs assessment, however this year's had been shorter due to a lack of analytical capacity but it was due to be signed off at the next SBP meeting and this could be provided to members. Members noted that the needs assessment was an activity that was supported by the Community Safety Team, assisted by partner agencies. Chris Williams informed the committee that paan spitting hotspots in the borough had been identified and that around £1,000 funding was available for an information campaign to dissuade this habit. He agreed to provide Councillor Shahzad with information on crime figures in Gladstone Park. The committee heard that information sharing amongst SBP partners was one of the big achievements of the partnership and information was shared on a daily basis between them and aggregated accordingly. Chris Williams advised that the percentage of juveniles in gangs in Brent was quite small and the average age of a gang member was 24. He explained that the structure of gangs in Brent consisted of a small number at the top of the hierarchy, underneath which stood a larger group of 'middle managers', followed by a larger still group of 'runners' who were likely to be younger. Members noted that gangs in the borough were primarily territorially defined and the Pathways Multi-Agency Partnership (PMAP) addressed the issue of those who were at risk of gang involvement through their work in schools, pupil referral units and those with mental health disorders. Chris Williams added that he would provide more information on the SBP's work on gangs to Alloysius Frederick. Chris Williams felt that the gap between reported incidents and offences was attributable to the police being better at reporting incidents and so being able to take appropriate steps to prevent an offence from being committed and accordingly the number of reported offences had remained relatively static, despite the rise in reported incidents.

Ch Supt Mick Gallagher informed the committee that there had been 433 recorded stop and searches in the borough in November 2014, of which 95 Section 1 stop and searches had led to 29 arrests. Black males were more likely to be stopped and searched than any other group and he suggested that this was attributable to gang related issues in areas such as Harlesden and Stonebridge. However, the likelihood of a black male being stopped and searched was considerably less than it was ten years ago. Ch Supt Mick Gallagher stated that stop and search had broad public support, however it was important that it was conducted with some sensitivity and the number of stop and searches had reduced as it was now more targeted. He confirmed that there had not been a single Section 60 stop and search in 2014, however dispersal orders that were still in place were used. Ch Supt Mick Gallagher acknowledged that there were some residents who perceived crime as worsening, however the figures showed that things were improving and so efforts

needed to be made to reassure the public and a small team was presently visiting wards to provide information in respect of burglaries, focusing on burglary hot spot areas first. It was also acknowledged that there was a particular need to reassure the most vulnerable members of the community. The committee noted that residential burglaries had reduced by 34% from 2,334 in 2013 to 1,996 in 2014.

Ch Supt Mick Gallagher confirmed that the controlled drinking zone would remain in place, however in order for it to be effective, it was also important that the community played a role in reporting street drinking through the official channels as there were resource implications for the police to consider. In respect of Gladstone Park, Ch Supt Mick Gallagher stated that there had been an incident involving some Romanians camping in the park which initially had not been responded to promptly. However, once a course of action had been agreed between the council and the police, it was acted upon swiftly. Ch Supt Mick Gallagher stated that the police could look into the issue of a potential blind spot in Gladstone Park. In respect of the Prevent Strategy, members heard that the Workshop to Raise Awareness of Prevent (WRAP) sought to address the issue of radicalisation and this involved working with schools and mosques and had good community support. It was noted that there were no specific figures in respect of the Prevent Strategy and this was not a stop and search activity, although a list of schools and mosques that had been visited could be given.

Turning to domestic violence, Supt Mick Gallagher emphasised the need for a corporate policy on this and Operation Dauntless enabled the police to identify the riskiest perpetrators. Additional resources had been given to address domestic violence including six additional police officers and although there had been a rise in the number of reported domestic violence incidents, so had there also been in prosecutions. Some community groups may find it harder to report domestic abuse, for example if English was not their first language. However, an example of positive work in this area included recent work with the Somali community to address female genital mutilation and this group had a desire to actively engage with the police and SBP. Members heard that victims of domestic abuse sometimes felt under pressure to drop charges, particularly if they still had feelings for their partner.

Chief Inspector (CI) Nick Davies (Chief Inspector Partnerships, Brent Metropolitan Police) advised that 38 public order notices for paan spitting had been served in the borough. He felt that the 'weeks of action' had been a useful exercise and increased the confidence in the community and partner organisations to work together and it was hoped that this scheme would continue, although a formal evaluation was yet to take place. CI Nick Davies also felt that the council and the police were working together better and some police staff were also co-located in the Civic Centre.

Councillor Denselow (Lead Member for Stronger Communities) commented that levels of engagement between the partners of SBP were strong at strategy level and it was a testament to police's relationship with the community that Brent was scarcely affected by the riots in 2011, although efforts continued to be made to improve the relationship. The changes to the Safer Neighbourhoods Team was a consequence to the resource challenges the police faced, however there was prompt information exchange between the police and the council. Councillor

Denselow also highlighted ways in which the community could help reduce crime, such as the work undertaken by Neighbourhood Watch organisations.

The Chair welcomed the SBP report and stressed the need to continue dialogue between the partners in the SBP and the community. He requested that the committee receive an update on the work of the SBP in around six months' time.

5. Interim feedback from the Budget Scrutiny Task Group

Councillor A Choudry, Chair of the Budget Scrutiny Task Group, introduced the report and invited Councillor Pavey (Deputy Leader of the Council) to respond to the draft task group report.

Councillor Pavey thanked members for the report and stated that he agreed with most of the points that it had raised. He welcomed the task group's support for a two year budget that would provide more freedom of movement in the medium and longer term. Councillor Pavey then set out the areas in which he was in agreement with the report, in particular:

- The need for greater voluntary sector involvement
- Focus on digital solutions
- Attracting investment
- Addressing issues relating to the number of interim and temporary council staff which were being looked at in each service area

In respect of prevention, Councillor Pavey advised that there were already a number of initiatives that were being undertaken, such as those in public health. Members heard that the Cabinet report on 15 December 2014 had been candid in terms of equalities implications and Councillor Pavey felt that the savings were feasible.

Councillor Pavey then stated that he did not agree with the comment in the task group report that there had been a limited choice in budget options, adding that there had been a far larger number of options outlined than was necessary and he felt they were realistic.

Members then discussed the task group report. A member sought clarification with regard to the total budget savings over the two year plan and whether the funding figures as set out in table one of the report included council tax receipts and were these receipts expected to increase. Another member asked if council tax receipts would increase due to the rising number of residents and properties in the borough. A question were raised as to whether there would be increased revenue from higher parking fines. On the subject of treasury activity, the total income raised from the last year was requested and was the figure comparable with other London boroughs such as Camden and Ealing. Views were sought on how robust and effective the consultation on the budget had been to date and could more be down to improve it. It was also commented that there had been a feeling amongst some residents that their feedback from the Borough Plan consultation had not been reflected in the budget proposals. Concerns were expressed that the council would not have the capacity to address the impact on vulnerable residents as a result of Government savings on healthcare and welfare benefits. In addition, it was asked what was expected from the voluntary sector to help in this area and whether it had

the capacity to undertake this and were there any budget figures available on this. The committee asked if there were any anticipated or potential shortfalls based on spend so far this year and was the budget essentially on target. It was also queried whether changes were being made too quickly for the council to be able to keep pace.

With the agreement of the Chair, Councillor Filson then addressed the committee. Councillor Filson broadly welcomed the report and in respect of options, he emphasised that this needed to be seen in the context of the need to make £35m savings in the first year alone and to ensure that in year savings targets for both years were met. He commented that not all organisational efficiency initiatives were as efficient as was intended and they can also impact upon the community. The implementation of the efficiency savings was also hugely challenging in view of the figures needed and consideration of the capacity to undertake it and within the timeframe prescribed was needed. Councillor Filson added that residents needed to be provided with details of how specific savings would affect services at public meetings such as the Brent Connects forums and this could include detailed hand outs with appropriate graphics.

In reply to the queries raised in the discussion, Mick Bowden (Operational Director – Finance, Finance and IT) confirmed targets of £35m savings for the first year and £19m in the second year. He confirmed that table one in the report referred only to the Government funding that the council received and in respect of council tax receipts there had been both an increase in the number of dwellings and those who were able to pay the full amount. This meant an increase to the council tax base of around 4% which equated to an additional £3.8m. Mick Bowden stated that he was not aware of any plans to increase parking fines fees. He advised that the total income from treasury activity for last year had been around £600,000 and this was around the average for London boroughs. He explained that the council's treasury management strategy sought to keep cash deposits low because of the risks involved in the current economic climate. Members heard that it was felt that the budget was on track and no risks were envisaged for 2014/15, although there were some risks associated with 2015/16.

Councillor Pavey advised that there was a 96.5% council tax collection rate target. He informed members that the council's reserves were low compared to other London boroughs and in terms of treasury activity, the high risks involved and low interest rates dictated its policy. In respect of consultation on the budget, Councillor Pavey stated that the first objective was to provide a broad picture of the current situation during the two planned large consultation meetings and in the next cycle of Brent Connects forums. Discussions would take place with the Leader and other Cabinet members as to how feedback from the Borough Plan consultation could be included in budget options. Councillor Pavey felt that the council was now much better at undertaking change management and he felt that the timescales could be met. In respect of the impact on vulnerable people, he stated that efforts were being made to build community resilience and an assessment of what voluntary organisations were capable of doing needed to be undertaken.

Councillor Allie suggested that the Investments and Pensions Manager be invited to the next Budget Scrutiny Task Group meeting. The Chair concluded by stating that there was still much work to do before the final task group report and the recommendations it would make.

6. Scrutiny Committee Forward Plan 2014/15

Members discussed the Scrutiny Committee Forward Plan that was before them. For the 10 February meeting, it was agreed that the items on future of inpatient mental health services and the update on the working with families project and children's social care be circulated for information only so as to allow for an item on winter resilience for the NHS Brent Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG) to be added. It was also agreed that there should be a detailed presentation on Social Care performance at a future meeting. In respect of the Customer Access Strategy, consideration would given as to whether this would go the 11 March meeting or a later one and that it would include information on how it would impact upon different groups. Consideration would also be given as to whether NHS Brent CCG commissioning intentions could be added to the work programme.

7. Any other urgent business

None.

The meeting closed at 9.40 pm

A CHOUDRY
Chair