

Area North Committee – 28 March 2012

8. Promoting Safe and Strong Communities in Area North

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Purpose of the Report

To provide an update on partnership working with respect to promoting community safety within Area North, following changes to the Mendip and South Somerset Community Safety Partnership and review of Area Action Panels.

This report also includes information on the new Police and Crime Panels and role of the Police and Crime Commissioner.

Beat Manager Toni Lines will attend the committee to provide an update from the Area North Neighbourhood Policing Team, Avon and Somerset Constabulary.

Public Interest

The Crime and Disorder Act of 1998 (Section 17) places a duty on the Council to do all it can to reduce crime and disorder, to work in partnership with other local organisations, and to and to consider the implications for community safety in decision-making. Although there have been amendments and additions to the Act over the years, this duty has been reinforced.

SSDC services work closely with the Police and other agencies to promote community safety. Examples include the licensing of premises for public entertainment and sales of alcohol; markets and taxi services; and work to reduce flytipping, litter and graffiti. SSDC also promotes and supports local partnerships and community groups working to make local areas safe places to live and work.

Recommendation

Members are asked to note and comment on the report and presentations.

Overview of crime and anti-social behaviour in Area North

Area North is a low crime area with most residents enjoying a higher quality of life than is sometimes found in more urban or less affluent areas. However, when crime or anti-social behaviour happens, it will be as significant to the victim or community as it would be anywhere, and so it is no less serious to make appropriate and effective responses.

A key area of current concern in Area North is theft from outbuildings and farms in more remote locations and more recently, significant thefts of metal cabling and lead from roofs. There is occasional vehicle crime – some in regular places e.g. Ham Hill. Remoteness (and the current price of metal) is a key factor in these crimes.

There are reports of anti-social behaviour which may affect local ‘fear of crime’, views on agencies, or satisfaction with quality of life, these can occur at different times in town centres, recreational areas or residential neighbourhoods. There is little consistency and no single cause. Finding solutions requires communications and understanding between those most affected – projects and initiatives will work best when tailored to suit local circumstances.

There is a mixture (which can be confusing and complex to residents) of both statutory and non-statutory services to assist with or address all of the above, together with the capacity of town, parish, district and county councillors, local community groups, and individual residents to help make things happen at a local level.

SSDC maintains a log of anti-social behaviour, the regular report from Streetscene services provides information on levels of flytipping and graffiti reported to SSDC. Further details of this work is available on request.

Reported crime is shown on the website www.police.uk The site can be searched by entering a postcode, town, village or street name into the search box to get instant access to street-level crime maps and data as well as details of local policing team and beat meetings.

Partnership Working in Area North

The Area Community Safety Action Panels were established in 2004 as part of the Mendip and South Somerset Community Safety Partnership, and benefitted from a substantial dedicated resource for staffing and support partly from SSDC but mostly through Home Office funding. Partners covering all panels included Somerset County Council (SCC), SSDC, Yarlinton Housing, Avon and Somerset Police, Devon and Somerset Fire and Rescue. Community representatives or services particular to one area also joined the panels.

Changes to the way community safety partnerships are funded, nationally and countywide has led to a reduction of dedicated staffing and grants budgets. In addition a large number of initiatives which started in one place, and proving successful have been developed into larger or district wide projects, requiring less support from a particular area panel. Examples include the Restorative Justice Panel and Community Speedwatch.

The current position is that while SSDC will continue to provide support to maintain and develop partnership working at an area level, this will be from within existing resources; with the expectation that other partners will contribute where there are mutual benefits. This position will continue to be reviewed over the next year as new Somerset wide arrangements develop.

The Area Committee, local ward members and SSDC service teams are an important part of these changes. The SSDC Community Safety Co-ordinator will support service teams and local councillors, and enable issues affecting the whole district to be raised at a more strategic level. The Area Development team will be responsible for maintaining area based partnerships and supporting Local Action Groups as appropriate.

Partners in Area North have agreed that good communication should be maintained between those working across Area North to promote safe and strong communities. Joining together for community engagement events is also supported. The Area North team will maintain contact details, and assist with communications and events. Work to establish the level and nature of support offered by each partner will take place over the coming months.

Existing arrangements for partnership and community engagement to promote community safety, reduce crime and the fear of crime.

The following are the main ways in which local public services work together and engage with local communities – *in addition to* operational work carried out such as beat management and crime investigation by the police; removal of flytipping and litter by SSDC and so on.

- Police and SSDC / SCC Councillor attendance at town and parish council meetings; beat surgeries (ASC)
- Local Action Groups and PACT meetings. (PACT = Partners and Communities Together)
- Community led partnerships / working groups at a parish level – promoting community safety and access to services / facilities
- DC/CCLIs – monthly meeting for Area North; community & environmental services reports; partner presentations.
- Neighbourhood inspections and Community Investment Plans (Yarlington).
- SSDC Community forums / parish workshops to raise awareness of services and to encourage self-help (**next event 26th April**).
- SSDC Area North supports four community based Local Information Centres (two host police posts), and can provide information leaflets etc to village halls or other local contact points.
- District wide management of anti-social behaviour (ASB).
- Special projects / initiatives based on community involvement eg Community Justice Panel, Community Speedwatch, Neighbourhood Watch, Farm Watch, Horse Watch.
- Use of newsletters, websites and local press.

Police and Crime Commissioner (PCCs) Elections

The creation of elected PCCs is the Government's way of ensuring that the public has a say in how services and resources are distributed within each force area. There will be one elected PCC for the whole of Avon and Somerset - the House of Lords approved an amendment to the Bill before Royal Assent to change the date of the first elections for PCCs to 15 November 2012.

Police and Crime Panels (PCPs)

Local authorities are being encouraged to consider how they will establish the Police and Crime Panel for their force area, and identify a Lead Authority who will be responsible for the day to day running of the Panel. The Lead Authority will receive Home Office funding to support this new responsibility. The Home Office will also be issuing some guidance to Local Authorities on establishing Panels. Discussions are currently underway across Avon and Somerset, where a proactive approach to setting up the new Panel is being taken. Workshops for officers and elected Members took place during November and December.

Police and Crime Panels will have a key role in providing the checks and balances to the power of Police and Crime Commissioners. There will be one elected representative from each Local Authority within the Avon & Somerset Force area.

The Commissioner will have to publish information which will help the public to understand what is happening in their area. They are required to publish the Police and Crime Plan and an Annual Report, which will give progress on the delivery of the plans. The public can use this information to hold the Commissioner to account and to inform their view on the Commissioner's work.

The Commissioner will have to take local priorities (of the Community Safety Partnerships within the force area) into account. Police and Crime Panels will have powers to make reports and recommendations about any actions and decisions taken by the Commissioner, and have a specific role in scrutinising the draft Police and Crime Plan, council tax precept, Chief Constable appointments, and the Annual Report.

Key to the scrutiny process will be transparency. All reports and recommendations made by the Panel will be published and sent to the force's Local Authorities. In return, the PCC must publish all their responses. The Panel will be able to publicly question the Commissioner about their actions and their Annual Report. The Panel will have veto powers over the Commissioner's proposals on the force precept, and over the appointment of the Chief Constable – with a two thirds majority vote.

Financial Implications

None directly arising from this report.

Council Plan Implications

Focus 4 – Health and Communities: “Ensure, with partners, that we respond effectively to community safety concerns raised by local people and that the strategic priorities for policing and crime reduction in South Somerset reflect local needs.”

Carbon Emissions & Adapting to Climate Change Implications

No direct implications

Equality and Diversity Implications

Community safety work is planned so as to ensure that events and initiatives are fully and fairly accessible to all sectors of the community. Some work is targeted towards vulnerable and hard to reach people in the population and is carefully designed to improve inter generational links and build community cohesion.

Background Papers: Area Action Panel review papers.