

Minutes of: PARTNER SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Date of Meeting: 4th November 2013

PRESENT: Councillor McInnes (Chair)
Councillors Essex (substituting for Morris), Knowles,
Fletcher, Kenyon, Roberts and Shipley

IN ATTENDANCE: Inspector John Fryer, Lancashire Constabulary
Ian Clark, Together Housing Group (GVH)
Councillor Barnes
Councillor Jackson
Councillor Gill
Pat Couch, Scrutiny Support Officer

2 Members of the public

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were received from Councillor Morris and Irene Divine, Co-opted Member.

2. MINUTES OF THE LAST MEETING

Resolved:

That the minutes of the meeting held on 9th September 2013, be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

3. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

4. URGENT ITEMS

There were no urgent items for discussion.

5. PUBLIC QUESTION TIME

The Chair agreed to deviate from the Procedure for Public Speaking and allow members of the public to ask questions as the reports were discussed.

6. CHAIR'S UPDATE

The Chair provided Members with the following update.

- The Leisure Update from CLAW and Rossendale Leisure Trust scheduled for tonight's meeting would now be presented to the next meeting in March 2014.

- The Task and Finish Groups would be finalising their work early in the New Year – The Public Rights of Way Task and Finish Group received 349 responses to the survey which would be discussed at the next meeting on 11th November
- The next joint health meeting would be held on 12th November.

7. PRESENTATION FROM INSPECTOR JOHN FRYER

Inspector John Fryer provided the Committee with an update on Rossendale's performance figures for 1st November 2012 to October 2013. These were as follows.

- All crime (3410 offences) had reduced by 140 offences over the previous 12 months
- Auto crime had increased by 2 from 227 offences
- Robbery had increased by 6 offences (6 last year)
- All assaults were 334 offences increase of 4
- All violent crime which includes assault, public order offences, harassment and possession of offensive weapons, 696 offences, a reduction of 73 offences.
- Domestic abuse – 284 offences, which is a reduction of 115
- Domestic Assaults had reduced by 49 offences to 97
- Anti-Social Behaviour had reduced with 116 fewer reported incidents, down from 2201 to 2085

In relation to response times, these were graded as follows:

Grade 1 – within 15 minutes (within the East of the Borough they respond within 10.3 minutes and West within 9.1 minutes)

Grade 2 – within one hour (within the East of the Borough they respond within 39.2 minutes and West within 32.1 minutes)

Grade 3 – within 48 hours

Detection rate for all crime was 31.3% down from 33.7% last year.

Inspector Fryer indicated that as a result of spending review, Lancashire Constabulary has had to identify savings of £73m by 2017/18. They were looking to remove back office functions whilst ensuring that neighbourhood, response policing and key investigative functions remain to protect the communities of Lancashire.

Management structures would also change, reducing from the six Divisions down to three across the County, whilst ensuring the delivery of high quality policing services.

Neighbourhood teams would remain working in the communities and East Division will see CID, Public Protection Unit and other services still supporting the response teams from the three briefing bases at Greenbank, Burnley and Colne.

From April 2014, Pennine and Eastern Divisions would merge to become East Division.

Waterfoot Police Station would remain open but with reduced capacity and whilst Officers will do their paperwork and take their refreshment breaks from Waterfoot, response Officers will start and finish their shifts from Burnley Police Station.

The six contact centres are shortly due to move into one main call centre at Hutton.

The Motorway Station at Salmesbury is also closing and staff would be moving to the 3 new Divisions across Lancashire.

Inspector Fryer provided information on a number of initiatives taking place in the Borough, which were as follows.

- Burglary campaign – Operation Julius
- ASB campaign running through Halloween to Bonfire night
- Use of social media to highlight specific crimes (cars taken to order)

Concern was raised about Officers, especially those who live in Rossendale having to go to Burnley to start and finish their shifts especially the difficulties that arise in the winter months. Last year the roads into Burnley were blocked due to snow and roads from Burnley to Rossendale were impassable. Officer time would be affected and would be a drain on resources.

Inspector Fryer stated that on arrival at Burnley at the start of each shift Officers will be briefed looking at current crime patterns, identifying lines of enquiry and hot spot areas. A suggestion was made that, rather than Officers from Rossendale travelling to Burnley, could this not be done by video conference from Waterfoot. This would save on Officer time, money and resources.

Members raised a number of questions which the Inspector responded. A concern was raised about the figures for domestic assault/abuse and Inspector Fryer agreed to seek further information on these and send a response to the Scrutiny Support Officer.

RESOLVED:

1. That Inspector John Fryer be thanked for his informative presentation.
2. That a letter be sent to Chief Superintendent Bithell expressing concerns about travel to and from Burnley at the start of each shift.

8. PRESENTATION ON TOGETHER HOUSING (GVH)

Ian Clark, Managing Director (West Region) Together Housing Group gave an update on the work of the Together Housing Group and its customers.

They currently have 3629 tenancies with 4326 tenants made up as follows.

- 12% have a disability
- 35% being over working age (61+)
- 59% women
- 81% white British
- 42% Full Housing Benefit and
- 23% Partial Housing Benefit

Welfare Reforms impact on the following.

- 227 tenants are hit with the spare room subsidy, commonly known as 'bedroom tax'
- 142 of these tenants have rent arrears
- Rent arrears of those under occupying have increased by £17,926
- Turnover of under occupied properties has increased by 7%

Ian explained the challenges both external and internal. He indicated that the Home and Communities Agency (HCA) regulate all activity and scrutinise housing associations to ensure they are financially viable and well governed.

In relation to risk, the HCA look at organisations such as Together Housing and how they calculate risk. They have had two visits in the last 6 months.

There was discussion on the impact of the welfare reforms and how they would support people who went into arrears.

With regard to Universal Credit, this would probably take 18-24 months to commence in Rossendale given the challenges experienced in the Demonstration Pilot areas, and they have already begun discussions with Credit Unions locally on how they can support people who do not have bank accounts at the moment.

The staff at Green Vale Homes were already contacting those who could be affected by 'under-occupancy', either by home visit or telephone, to talk through the options available to them.

For people in difficulties financially, there was the option of Discretionary Housing Payments with a pot of money available to support these customers. It was agreed that more publicity was needed to encourage

people to claim this payment as there may be the danger of money being left over at the end of the financial year.

Ian explained that Groundwork Pennine Lancashire officially became a member of the Together Housing Group on 9th July forming a partnership that is believed to be a first in the housing sector. Groundwork will now be called New Ground Together.

The two businesses have over the past worked on many projects together such as the Reach Out Youth Project in Darwen and the New Boundaries Fencing Project, which have had a major impact on the lives of those who have taken part.

The new partnership would ensure communities across the region benefit, with £3m being pumped into community projects across the North of England this year and at least £1.7m the following year.

A number of questions were raised to which Ian responded.

RESOLVED:

That Ian be thanked for his informative presentation.

The meeting commenced at 6.30pm and closed at 8.50pm.

Signed
(Chair)

Date