



ST. ALBANS COMMUNITY SAFETY CONSULTATION FORUM

7.00pm, Wednesday 15 March 2006

Council Chamber, St. Albans City & District Council offices

MINUTES

Present:

Sheila Bond
Cllr. David Clarke
Cllr. Robert Clarkson
Janice Crombie
Judith Everett
Robert C. Fox
Henry (Taffy) Jones
Joy Leighton
Cllr. Bert Pawle
Cllr. Brian Peyton
Cllr. Philip Rosen
Rick Taylor
Roy Taylor
Stephen Veal

HACRO
Colney Heath Parish Council
Hertfordshire County Council
Neighbourhood Watch
University of the Third Age
Crime Prevention Panel
London Colney Parish Council
Victim Support
St. Albans City & District Council
St. Albans City & District Council
Redbourn Parish Council
Neighbourhood Watch Co-ordinator
HACRO

Officers:

Chief Supt. Alison Roome-Gifford	Hertfordshire Constabulary
Sally Patient	Hertfordshire Police Authority
Chris Roach	St. Albans City & District Council
Rob Thackeray	St. Albans City & District Council
Neil Kieran	St. Albans City & District Council
Ian Markwell	Hertfordshire Fire & Rescue Service

1. Welcome and introduction

Cllr. Brian Peyton chaired the meeting.

2. Apologies

Apologies were received from: Linda Bateman, Citizens Advice Bureau Manager, Jane Cloke, Dennis Cooper, Charles Ferrier, Mike Hanson, Doug Hook, Mark Hunter, Graham Lane, Alice Nugent, Cllr. Malachy Pakenham, Peter Parsons, Adrian Smith, Mike Smith, Janet Tansley, Cllr. Iris Tarry, Marilyn Tricker, Steve Welch, Cllr. Allan Witherick.

3. Minutes of meeting held on Thursday 20 October 2005

The minutes of the last meeting were agreed.

4. Matters arising

Sally Patient will provide an update on Agenda Item 4 (Police Force restructuring) from the last meeting at Agenda Item 5.

5. Police force restructuring

Sally Patient, Communications Manager for the Police Authority, gave a presentation on the background and proposals for restructuring the Police Authority and Constabulary. This presentation outlined developments which had taken place since the last meeting.

On 9 November the Home Secretary responded to the Eastern Region with three options to develop business cases. Option 1: Regional (all six forces merge). Option 2: North/ South divide (Hertfordshire merges with Essex and Bedfordshire). Option 3: East/ West divide (Hertfordshire merges with Bedfordshire and Cambridgeshire).

Hertfordshire Police Authority met on 16 December 2005 and agreed to ask the Home Secretary to look at a federated option and, on the Chief Constable's recommendation, develop a business case for the merger of Hertfordshire and Bedfordshire.

In December the Government assigned £50 million (diverted funding – not new money) available to be divided amongst any authorities submitting a voluntary merger by the 23 December (Home Office deadline for Police Authorities to submit voluntary merger proposals). These monies did not bring about any proposals to merge by Police Authorities.

Following a further question there was a discussion on the relative sizes and performance of county Police forces (Bedfordshire and Essex) with which Hertfordshire is likely to merge. It was noted that Bedfordshire Police force did not perform as well as Hertfordshire, and that Essex was considerably larger both in terms of geography and population.

A meeting is to be held on Monday 20 March between Eastern Region Chief Constables, Police Authority chairs and the Home Secretary. It is expected that the Home Secretary will provide proposals for force mergers in the Eastern region and stipulate a timetable by which mergers must be agreed. An update will be provided to the next meeting. On 31 March an extraordinary meeting of Hertfordshire Police Authority will be held to discuss the Home Secretary's proposals.

In response to a question, Sally Patient explained that, under the current proposals, the Police Basic Command Unit would remain the same.

It is expected that the proposed mergers would take two to three years to implement and be very costly. The Authority is keen to ensure that the costs do not fall on local Council Tax payers and that the people of Hertfordshire benefit from any merger. If there is a compulsory merger, the Home Secretary would have to provide a four month period of consultation, the details of which are uncertain.

6. Policing Plan 2006/ 7

Sally Patient outlined a new formula through which funding is allocated to the Police. The gross figure was subject to 'top-slicing' to pay for the new police pension arrangements. The 'top-sliced' portion was based on a single year, which was not representative for the pension payments made by Hertfordshire. Consequently, the net amount allocated to the Authority falls short of what is needed.

Despite this, however, there will be no reduction in frontline services as a significant sum has been transferred from the Authority's financial reserves to cover this shortfall.

A number of questions were asked about the level of service, particularly with regard to alcohol-related violent crime – a major public concern. Sally Patient reassured the Forum that alcohol-related violent crime would remain a Police priority and attract the necessary level of resource.

The Forum was told that three licensed premises in Hertfordshire had been closed under new powers conferred by the Licensing Act 2005. Chief Superintendent Alison Roome-Gifford described the difficulties in obtaining reliable data on the influence of alcohol as an aggravating factor in the offences of assault and criminal damage. She also drew attention to the fact that it is illegal to serve alcohol to an individual who is drunk and, when this happens, the offending licensed premises are traced and such incidents used as evidence in prosecutions and closure applications.

In response to a question, Alison Roome-Gifford outlined ways that the police deal with incidents of drunkenness, including Designated Public Protection Orders. This prompted a discussion on people drinking – and getting inebriated – before they go out to drink in pubs.

The subject of vehicle crime and traffic offences was raised through a question. This stimulated a debate on the shortcomings of speed cameras and their failure to detect the use of mobile phones by motorists. Sally Patient reported that 3,700 tickets had been issued by Hertfordshire Constabulary to people driving whilst using a mobile phone.

Sally Patient informed the Forum that - following seizure - 2,000 cars had been crushed in Hertfordshire during the last twelve months. The Chairman questioned why vehicles are crushed and not sold as this appears to be a waste of money. An answer was not available at the meeting but it was agreed that the information would be included in the minutes. On behalf of the Police, Sally Patient subsequently provided the following answer:

The Constabulary recovers vehicles from people found driving without a licence or insurance, and - under Section 59 of the Police Reform Act – for vehicles driven in an antisocial manner.

If the driver/ owner fails to produce the correct documentation and/ or pay the appropriate fee for recovery and storage, the vehicle is then crushed or sold depending on its value and age.

The depressed market value of second hand cars and motorcycles, combined with the cost of auctioning vehicles, and the liability the Constabulary has in relation to the sale of unroadworthy vehicles, means it is cost-effective to only sell those above a pre-determined value and crush the rest (the majority).

If a vehicle is sold, the Constabulary can deduct recovery and storage costs, but is required to return the remainder to the legal owners. There is, therefore, no financial gain for the Constabulary, and no reasonable case for selling vehicles as a matter of policy.

A copy of the presentation given by Sally Patient is attached.

7. Police performance to 28 February 2006

Chief Superintendent Alison Roome-Gifford reported that in terms of total performance against British Crime Survey (BCS) targets there was a deficit of 127

crimes. A focus on addressing theft of, and theft from, vehicles should enable this target to be achieved by the end of the 2006/ 7 year.

A significant problem is the BCS category: theft from person. This is causing some concern. A crime pattern analysis has been undertaken which clearly demonstrates that this mainly happens on market days (Wednesday and Saturday). There is considerable evidence that a number of eastern European gangs are operating in St. Albans. Arrests reduce the number of offences for a short time but gradually the figure rises again. A number of measures have been considered, for example signs warning of the presence of pickpockets, however care must be taken not to cause unreasonable alarm.

The target for incidents of wounding is currently not being met, however this is due to changes in the National Crime Recording Standard.

There is currently a high level of cycle theft. Chris Roach mentioned excellent work being undertaken by Tony Clark, the Council's Antisocial Behaviour Caseworker, to address this.

The iQuanta datasets indicated that the Central Police District is performing better than average with regard to vehicle crime.

There have been significant achievements in disrupting drugs markets and trafficking. Chief Superintendent Roome-Gifford commented that there might be more developments in the near future.

A question was raised about how 'joined up' the criminal justice system is with regard to dealing with habitual criminals. Prolific offenders are discussed by the CPS through the Criminal Justice Forum.

A short debate took place on the concept of 'three strikes and you're out'.

Chief Superintendent Alison Roome-Gifford briefly outlined performance against the key targets in the Policing Plan.

8. Community Safety update

On behalf of the Community Safety Partnership, three officers from St. Albans City & District Council's Community Safety Unit provided a presentation on current initiatives and progress.

Rob Thackeray introduced the update, re-presenting the Priorities of the 2005 – 2008 Community Safety Strategy. A summary of the recent strategic review undertaken at Responsible Authorities Group awayday (17 February) was provided with an explanation of the seven Annual Priorities for the 2006/ 7 Community Safety Action Plan:

- Fear of becoming a victim of crime
- Crime & Disorder Act 1998: Section 17
- Antisocial behaviour
- Drugs
- Vehicle crime
- Burglary
- Business crime

Neil Kieran then presented a synopsis of the Respect Action Plan and noted that – under this Plan - targets must be set to reduce antisocial behaviour by 2008.

The Plan outlines action on exclusions and proposes the notion of truancy partnerships. A large section focuses on the parents of offending children. Measures included are the reduction of benefits and other financial supplements for parents of offending children; a dedicated phone line (101) for reporting non-emergency incidents; and a power to close properties within 48 hours where antisocial behaviour is disrupting neighbourhoods.

Neil Kieran commented that the Respect Action Plan is at present a collection of aspirational initiatives. Currently there is no specific information on its implementation or funding, and no sign whether the Antisocial Behaviour Act 2003 will be revised, or other legislation put in place, as a statutory framework to support the Plan.

The Forum was informed of a current Anti-Social Behaviour Order application to prevent an individual from begging and drinking in the town centre. Neil Kieran also reported that there are four other cases for Antisocial Behaviour Orders being considered.

Neil Keiran told the Forum that introductory and demoted tenancies were in place to ensure a quick response to antisocial behaviour by Council tenants. An example was given of a problem family evicted within the last week.

The Council's Anti-Social Behaviour Caseworker, Tony Clark, is targeting nuisance youths through a local football coaching scheme, 'Kick-it'.

The Youth Activities Programme (YAP) is being developed for Easter and summer school holidays to occupy youths at risk of offending. The spring half-term programme has just taken place, with snowboarding (amongst other activities) offered.

In response to a question, Neil Kieran stated that if participants misbehave they are removed from the YAP. The behaviour of these individuals is then monitored and – if they behave in an antisocial manner – they may become subject to Antisocial Behaviour Contracts or Anti-Social Behaviour Orders.

Neil Kieran described the process for identifying children at risk.

Chris Roach then presented details of achievements by the Community Safety Partnership.

Sophie Westbrook's excellent work on substance misuse issues was described. A programme of drugs paraphernalia training is being developed.

A policy 'Drugs and Alcohol in the Workplace' has been recently introduced in St. Albans City & District Council.

The Council has recently achieved the Safer Car Parks award for the Russell Avenue car park.

Other recent developments are:

Automatic Number Plate Recognition (ANPR) systems have recently been put in place. In response to a question about gathering evidence about Road Tax offences, Chris Roach explained that the system is intended to address serious criminal offences and aimed principally at prolific offenders.

Following a number of offences at the Bricket Wood Leisure Centre, CCTV cameras and the CCTV monitoring system has been upgraded.

The Business Crime Reduction Partnership - formed July 2005 – is in the process of recruiting a Co-ordinator. Today was the closing date for applications; it is expected

that interviews will take place and a candidate offered the post by the end of March.

High levels of cycle theft are currently being experienced. As these thefts are principally from St. Albans City railway station, the Police and Council are working closely with British Transport Police to address this situation. Tony Clark, the Council's Antisocial Behaviour Caseworker, has drafted an action plan, the implementation of which is currently being looked at.

The Domestic Violence Conference took place on 28 February 2006. It was well attended and informative, and looked at a wide range of issues, including domestic violence within the traveller community, and forced marriages.

Feedback was given on the very successful Taxi Marshall scheme, which is being copied by other authorities and partnerships.

The Phase 2 Designated Public Protection Order was enacted on 1 January 2006 in St. Albans and Harpenden. This Order gives Police Officers and other accredited persons the power to confiscate and dispose of alcohol if it is consumed in these areas. It is proposed to now establish Orders designating zones at St. Albans City and Harpenden railway stations.

Rob Thackeray concluded the presentation by briefly explaining the content of the 2006/ 7 Community Safety Annual Plan and how performance will be measured.

9. Any other business

A number of items were introduced:

Cllr. Brian Peyton reported on the Councillor evening (held 23 February) noting that it was a productive evening with a strong community focus.

Police Community Support Officers (PCSO) were discussed. A question was asked on how their effectiveness was to be determined. Sally Patient commented that evaluation has recently started and will take place every six months.

A further question concerned the ethnic profiling of PCSOs. Sally Patient reported that there is a good, representative ratio in the Metropolitan Police. There is, however, some evidence that cultural differences may lead some BME groups to consider the Police not to be a good career with the PCSO option being more acceptable.

The transference rates of PCSO to full Police Officer are high.

Sally Patient explained that the PCSO scheme will be expanded with 359 officers proposed to be in post by 2008.

Members of the Forum were complimentary about work undertaken by PCSOs.

A question was asked about the Shopwatch initiative and how it works. Sally Patient described the initiative and the co-ordination of radio systems.

A member of the Forum, representing the Crime Prevention Panel, announced that the Panel will be issuing purse chains in the coming month.

A brief and general discussion took place on locality policing. Sally Patient explained the purpose of locality Ward Police meetings and how matters raised at these meetings are managed operationally.

Sally Patient asked that, if sufficient information was available, a report on the Police & Criminal Justice Bill be made available at the next meeting.

Cllr. Brian Peyton closed the meeting with a request that chairs and tables are arranged in a circle for the next meeting.

10. Date of next meeting

Wednesday 21 June at 7pm