

## **MINUTES OF MEETING NO 3 OF THE COMMUNITY SAFETY SUB-COMMITTEE**

held in Committee Room 2, District Council Offices, Civic Centre, St Peter's Street, St Albans on Tuesday 22 March 2005 at 7.00pm.

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### **Present:**

Councillors Lusby (Chairman), Steer (Vice-Chairman), Canham, Foster, Eleanor Harris, Marshall, Smith and Stevenson.

### **Apology for Absence:**

Councillor Heritage.

### **In Attendance:**

Councillor Swendell.

### **Officer in Attendance:**

Mrs C Roach, Community Support Manager.

### **Corporate Administrator:**

Mr P Storey.

## **1. REPLACEMENT MEMBERS**

It was noted that Councillors Brazier and Canham had replaced Councillors K Morris and Stevenson respectively as members of the Sub-Committee for this meeting only in accordance with the notification procedure.

## **2. DECLARATION OF INTEREST**

Councillor Marshall declared personal, non-prejudicial interests in agenda items 6(i) and 6(ii), Recent Crime Figures and Trends and the Draft Crime and Disorder Reduction Strategy 2005-2008, as his wife worked for the Home Office.

## **3. MINUTES**

The Minutes of Meeting No.2 of the Sub-Committee held on 20 January 2005 were taken as read and confirmed.

## **4. RECENT CRIME FIGURES AND TRENDS**

The Community Support Manager circulated crime figures for St Albans from the Home Office for consideration by Members. As the figures were not for publication

and were not accessible by members of the public, the Corporate Administrator advised that they should be considered in Part II of the meeting, whilst further discussion could be held in Part I. Members expressed the view that such information was of public interest and should be considered publicly. They asked that the reason for confidentiality be queried with the Home Office, particularly since it opposed the spirit of the Freedom of Information Act. It was noted, however, that the Council had no discretion in the matter if the information was classed as not for publication by the Home Office.

5. **EXCLUSION OF PUBLIC**

**RESOLVED**

That under Section 100(A)(4) of the Local Government Act 1972, the public be excluded from the meeting for the following item of business on the grounds that it involved the likely disclosure of confidential information given to the Council by a government department on terms which forbid its public disclosure.

6. **RECENT CRIME FIGURES AND TRENDS**

The Community Service Manager circulated iQuanta Policing Performance Analysis for the period 1 November 2004-31 January 2005 and St Albans Crime Figures for 1 April 2004-28 February 2005. The figures indicated the District's position on crime and disorder when compared with similar areas in the "family group" and showed the District was just above the average for crime in the group. It was noted that changes of position within the group could result from very small increases or decreases in crimes, often as low a figure as four crimes. Burglary and vehicle crime were particular issues in the District and had been identified as areas of concern at a previous meeting of the Sub-Committee. It was noted that it was important to consider trends for crime, to see if they were rising or falling. Violent crime was rising and the Police had indicated that this was an area which should be monitored.

The Licensing and General Purposes Committee at its meeting on 3 March 2005 had asked that the Police be more pro-active regarding alcohol related crime. The Community Support Manager stated that the Police were monitoring incidents of alcohol-related disorder to see if the changes in Licensing legislation had any effect. A performance indicator around this issue would be incorporated in the CDRP Action Plan for 2005/06. There was some discussion on issues around the difficulties of enforcement action by the Police, where resources could be diverted by incidents related to alcohol and Members asked for further information from the Police. Members also asked that the iQuanta and St Albans Crime Figures both be presented to future meetings for consideration.

**RESOLVED**

- (i) That the Police be asked to attend a future meeting to report on enforcement matters regarding alcohol related crime.
- (ii) That crime figures for the District be reported to future meetings of the Sub-Committee.

The Sub-Committee then returned to Part I of the meeting.

7. **RECENT CRIME FIGURES AND TRENDS**

Members asked if the crime figures were used as the basis for Police activities and operations. The Community Support Manager stated that specific operations were planned on the basis of the issues contained in the figures. Councillor Swendell stated that many of the figures were produced in response to requests from the Home Office for statistical information and not for operational reasons.

Members noted that St Albans was ranked 172 out of 376 CDRPs (Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnerships) in England and Wales. It was also noted that Hertfordshire was one of only 40% of Police forces which were fully compliant with the Home Office's National Crime Recording Statistics (NCRS). Where forces were compliant, the crime figures they produced were ethically recorded. As other forces moved towards full compliance, it was expected that their recorded crimes would increase and that St Albans' position would improve in comparison.

The percentage of incidents of violent crime appeared to have increased as a result of the changes to the way crimes were recorded under NCRS. Under this system, all incidents had to be logged if a person considered a crime had been committed, before an investigation was undertaken to see if a crime had taken place. The Chief Constable of Hertfordshire had tried to persuade the Home Office to take into account the sharp increase in violent crime figures resultant from compliance with NCRS when setting Hertfordshire crime reduction targets, but had been unsuccessful.

Councillor Marshall asked about the increase in the number of racially aggravated offences in the District. The Community Support Manager stated that such crimes could include name calling and harassment by text messages which were not generally perceived as violent crimes. The Community Support Manager reminded members that the Home Office violent crime category includes approximately 50 offences, but that only 6% of those would be considered by the public to be truly violent offences. The Police Authority were aware of this gap in perception and had undertaken to "tighten up" the definition of violent crime for their own monitoring purposes. She undertook to provide copies of the new Policing Plan to Members for information.

**RESOLVED**

That the report be noted.

8. **DRAFT COMMUNITY SAFETY STRATEGY 2005-2008**

The Community Support Manager reported that the draft Community Safety Strategy 2005-2008 had now been signed off by the Cabinet, the Local Strategic Partnership and the local Primary Care Trust. Full Council at its meeting on 13 April 2005 would also be asked to sign off the Strategy. The Strategy would then be submitted to the Home Office for approval.

Councillor Swendell asked how Members and the public would be aware whether or not the Strategy was achieving its objectives. The Community Support Manager stated that chapter 5 of the Strategy contained targets and this section would be expanded. An action plan would be drawn up to support the objectives in the Strategy. Performance management would be undertaken by the Performance Management Group which meets every two months and which assess progress against the action plan and report to the Responsible Authorities Group should any areas of the strategy be failing.

Members asked how the Strategy would be publicised and suggested various ideas and also asked how new crimes/issues could be included in the future. The Community Support Manager stated that the Strategy was a complex document and she intended to produce a more user friendly version for the public. She took on board members' suggestions and it was agreed that the Strategy would be advertised on the Council's website, in the Housing Times, and Parish Councils would be asked to publicise it in their newsletters. Hard copies would be available from the District Council Offices and in libraries, schools etc. The Strategy was flexible enough to include new crimes/issues if they arose and to allow a change of direction if required over its lifespan.

### **RESOLVED**

That the draft Community Safety Strategy be noted.

## 9. **MEMBERS' INVOLVEMENT IN LOCALITY PROBLEM SOLVING**

Members gave their views on the Locality Problem Solving seminar which had been held on 14 March 2005

The Chairman stated that people had been aware of the local situation which had been chosen for a case study so that Police knew which scenarios had worked and were unwilling to look at other ideas. Councillor Eleanor Harris considered that the seminar was more of an introduction to the Community Safety Strategy and had devoted less time to locality problem solving than she had expected. Councillor Steer had found the exercise useful and made people think about the various agencies which could be involved in solving local problems.

The Chairman asked Councillor Smith, who had been involved in a multi-agency situation in Sopwell Ward, to give a presentation to the next meeting of the Sub-Committee on what this had entailed.

The Community Support Manager stated that consideration was being given to forming a locality problem solving group for St Peter's Ward, rather than having just one group for the whole of the City Centre. This would be a virtual group and would meet when required. The intention of locality problem solving groups was to bring together all relevant agencies in a ward to deal with a specific local problem. This would be orchestrated by the ward constable and local Members. Problems involving two or more wards could be dealt with in the same manner.

Members expressed concerns regarding the abstraction of ward Police officers to deal with specific problems elsewhere in the District, or beyond, which

weakened the contacts between officers and their wards. The Chairman suggested that Police ward staffing and abstraction should be reported to the Sub-Committee on a quarterly basis.

The Community Support Manager stated that the Hertfordshire Police boundary had been extended several years ago to include areas which had formerly been in the Metropolitan Police area. At the Policing Plan launch on Monday, the Chief Constable had reported that the Hertfordshire force was now up to full strength for the first time since that extension, although approximately 25% of the force was reasonably new and there was a lack of experience in some of the higher ranks.

### **RESOLVED**

- (i) That Councillor Smith be asked to give a presentation on a multi-agency issue which had taken place in Sopwell Ward to the next meeting of the Sub-Committee.
- (ii) That Police ward staffing and abstraction be considered at future meetings on a quarterly basis.

### 10. **DATES FOR MEETINGS OF THE SUB-COMMITTEE IN 2005/06**

It was agreed that the Sub-Committee should meet 4 times per year, with dates chosen to fit around the production of local crime figures and meetings of the Responsible Authorities Group. The Corporate Administrator undertook to email Members with suggestions for possible meeting dates.

### 11. **COMMUNITY SAFETY CONSULTATION FORUM**

The Community Support Manager invited Members to attend meetings of the Community Safety Consultation Forum if they wished. She would provide Members with dates of the Forum meetings.

The meeting ended at 8.20m.

**(Signed)**

**CHAIRMAN**