

MINUTES of the meeting of General Overview & Scrutiny Committee held at The Council Chamber - The Shire Hall, St. Peter's Square, Hereford, HR1 2HX on Tuesday 19 January 2016 at 2.00 pm

Present: Councillor WLS Bowen (Chairman)
Councillor CA Gandy (Vice Chairman)

Councillors: JM Bartlett, MJK Cooper, J Hardwick, DG Harlow, EPJ Harvey, JF Johnson, PM Morgan, GJ Powell, AJW Powers, NE Shaw, EJ Swinglehurst, A Warmington and SD Williams

In attendance: Councillors

Officers:

58. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

No apologies for absence were received.

59. NAMED SUBSTITUTES

No substitutions were made.

60. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

61. QUESTIONS FROM THE PUBLIC

No questions had been received in advance of the meeting in relation to the following items.

62. HEREFORDSHIRE COMMUNITY SAFETY PARTNERSHIP STRATEGY AND RELATED PERFORMANCE

The cabinet member for Economy and Corporate Services introduced the representatives from West Mercia Police, the office of the Police and Crime Commissioner (PCC), public health commissioning, and Addaction. It was noted for a full meeting of the Community Safety Partnership (CSP) there would be 26 people.

It was explained that the purpose of the CSP is to consider a broad range of issues and to develop strategy. The CSP is not intended to handle the detail of cases but to develop conjoined strategy between multiple organisations.

Funding for the CSP was received from the office of the PCC. There were four priority areas identified by the CSP for funding:

- Reoffending
- Community cohesion and antisocial behaviour
- Domestic Violence
- Substance abuse involving the activity of street pastors

In total £496017 was received from the office of the PCC, additional funding is targeted for specific activities. Additional there is a business unit operated by Herefordshire

Council with a running cost of £75,000 for the adult safeguarding board, the children's safeguarding board, and the Community Safety Partnership.

The Cabinet member for Economy and Corporate Services introduced Superintendent Sue Thomas to discuss items regarding funding and to recount the latest crime statistics for Herefordshire.

Superintendent Thomas explained that there were two sections of relevant funding: the superintendent's fund and the business and rural fund. In response to budget cuts, a focus had been placed on methods of crime prevention which were the most cost effective for reducing crime. A number of examples of cost effective methods were given, including engagement activity in the night time economy as well as household alarms.

It was explained that rural and cyber crime were a focus of the PCC. In Herefordshire this had led to a number of successful initiatives:

- Work had been done with action plans to develop neighbourhood watch, and to improve community and farm watch schemes. Funding for these schemes was limited going forward.
- A mobile contact centre had been secured allowing better provision in rural areas.
- Noise teams had been made available during peak times during the summer. These had previously only been available from Mondays to Fridays.

It was stated that Herefordshire is experiencing a 26% increase in recorded crime year on year. However, it was important to understand the context of this:

- Following an audit process, old records had been backdated. This led to an increased number of recorded crimes even though some of these may not have actually occurred in the current year.
- Procedural changes in the recording of crime had led to an increase. For example, in domestic violence cases, methods of investigation had changed generating a higher number of reported crimes from a single case.
- Reported cases of harassment had increased significantly. Many of these cases involved communication technology which had not existed on the same scale previously.
- There had been a 10% increase in crime with injury, notably linked to the night time economy. While there had been an increase, an award had been received for night time policing in Herefordshire with the work done with street pastors and was considered best practice.
- Reported incidents of rape had increased, it was noted that public awareness of rape and sexual abuse cases had been significant in recent times and that this was believed to have led to an increase in reporting.
- Nuisance and noise complaints had seen an increase, however this trend was expected to reverse due to work done targeting the area.
- Burglary had increased, particularly in the Southern areas of the county and the Ledbury area in autumn 2014. However it was noted that police had launched operation Daring, adopted new tactics in the area and had worked with Ledbury Town Council.

Superintendent Thomas identified a number of key areas of work:

- Assessments were being carried out to identify trends in which crimes posed the greatest threat and to which groups.
- An operation was in place to counter drug dealers entering Herefordshire from the west midlands via rail routes. It was noted that this had led to a large number of arrests and that there was good cooperation with Birmingham Police forces.
- Cross border criminals were being targeted on the Gloucestershire and Welsh border areas. It was described that operation nightingale had been launched with

large numbers of officers involved in night-time operations, for example in the Peterchurch area.

- It was explained that the nature of crimes being faced in Herefordshire had changed significantly in recent times and that this was reflected in the Force's priorities. It was noted that mental health activity, urban regeneration, and digital and cybercrime were now key priority areas while not having had the same levels of prominence previously.

Superintendent Thomas summarised the resource situation of the policing in Herefordshire. Key points included:

- Central government cuts had not adversely affected the structure of police forces. While efficiencies were being made, major changes to organisational structures had not had to be made.
- There were 240 members of staff under the superintendent's jurisdiction with additional support by people from many commands
- Police in Herefordshire had an intelligence capacity and a firearms capacity not directly under the command of the superintendent but which were used to support police operations.
- While there had been a reduction in the number of police stations there was still police coverage for the whole county.
- A new build police station to be a joint premises with the fire service was to be constructed.

The chairman asked if additional information could be provided in regard to cybercrime. Superintendent Thomas explained that cybercrime was a particular interest of the Police and Crime Commissioner and detailed a number of briefings which would serve as a good source of information for members.

The cabinet member for Economy and Corporate Services explained how the CSP operates and how priorities are set.

It was explained that Understanding Herefordshire, a research project providing statistics and analysis of demographics and other information about Herefordshire which was a key source of information. When combined with crime statistics and the statutory requirements of the CSP, priority areas can be developed. It was explained that once priorities have been identified, the CSP works to develop strategies seeing improvement in these areas.

The four priority areas were identified as:

- Reducing re-offending
- Reducing the harm done by alcohol and drugs
- Domestic violence
- Community cohesion

It was explained that using statistics, the effectiveness of the CSP in meeting its priorities in comparison to 2013 and how situations have developed could be measured. It was explained that in February 2016 this information would be analysed in full by the CSP and that the results of this analysis would be published through Understanding Herefordshire.

The Cabinet member for economy and corporate services commented on how the effectiveness of the CSP was reviewed, and how its strategies were updated. It was explained that action plans were reviewed on a regular basis and that funding was important within this process.

- Funding was an important consideration, while core funding had been received for 2016-2017, PCC elections in May, little funding had been confirmed for the longer term.

- Priorities of the CSP were reviewed regularly, notably in response to crime statistics.
- The CSP intended to add child sexual abuse as a fifth priority area for the CSP and that an action plan for this area was being developed.

A representative of the office of the police and crime commissioner outlined the current funding situation for the Herefordshire CSP.

- The current police and crime commissioner has been working on the commissioning framework for CSPs across the West Mercia region.
- Funding for the next financial year would be set according to funding received when the PCC took office.
- In total the PCC controls £4.5 million, £1.5 million of which goes to victims with the rest of the funding going to crime prevention.
- Work with partners on strategic planning would continue until the purdah period ahead of the PCC election on May 5 2016. It was noted that while the current PCC is in place there will be assurances given over funding for the transition period.
- It was to be confirmed by the ministry of justice how much funding will be appropriated for victims. However, the core amount of funding would still be provided but there was no confirmation on how much additional funding can be given for business, rural, and cybercrime.
- It was explained that longer term funding for CSPs would be decided upon in the near future, however strict estimates could not be given over funding until decisions had been made in March.

The learning and development officer presented on the four priority areas of the CSP.

The following key points were made in regard to re-offending:

- When the CSP had previously been reviewed by scrutiny 12 months before the meeting, there had been concern over provision for re-offending support for low risk offenders would be given to private companies.
- It was explained that despite some challenges this had been a relatively smooth process. While there were still challenges which would have affected many individuals involved the transition had proven to be a success.
- It was acknowledged that due to the length of time of re-offending cases, the most recent data on re-offending available was from 2013.
- Youth crime was an issue in Herefordshire. What was becoming clear was that housing and accommodation for individuals concerned as well as mental health support was important in responses.
- Since 2015 re-offending rates had seen a downturn.
- While compared against other authorities in the West Mercia region, Herefordshire was doing well in re-offending rates, Shropshire had a lower rate of re-offending. As a result it had been identified that Shropshire's activities would be examined for best practice.
- The number of first time entrants in re-offending was reducing.

The following key points were made in reaction to reducing the impacts of alcohol and drugs, the second priority of the CSP.

- The impacts of alcohol and drugs were closely related to the night time economy. As such, significant work had been done with licensees and street pastors.
- 40% of domestic violence crimes were related to alcohol.
- Hospital admissions relating to alcohol in Herefordshire were not distinct from average rates in West Mercia. However, many cases involved individuals over the age of 50 indicating long term substance abuse.

- 50% of people in treatment for drug abuse have been previous offenders. One of the biggest challenges for the recently commissioned group Addaction would be to combat this.
- 18% of the younger range of individuals in treatment are using cannabis
- Opiate use is high among individuals of higher age ranges in treatment

Representatives from Addaction made a number of comments specifically in relation to the second priority area for the CSP:

- Previous providers for addiction services had adopted a heavily medical approach. This allowed opiate users to receive a high quality of treatment, however work has subsequently been done to look at recovery and understanding individuals who are in treatment. It was noted that Herefordshire has rates of addiction three times worse than the national average. This highlights a need for work to be done in rehabilitation, it was explained that Addaction have been commissioned to meet this need.
- It was explained that a focus of Addaction's work was to work closely with partner organisations in order to offer a single point of contact. It was described that this makes service use simpler and makes service use effective and visible. Additionally, successfully recovered service users would act as champions for the service helping current service users. It was explained that this format was showing continued success across all of Addaction's 150 services.

The following key points were made in discussion of domestic violence, the third priority area of the CSP

- Domestic violence requires the commitment of significant resources in order to provide housing support and with the use of women and men's aid charities.
- Recorded incidents of domestic violence are increasing in Herefordshire, however it was noted that this was at least in part due to procedural change.
- Herefordshire has seen a year on year increase in referrals as well as increases in calls to a helpline. It was explained that it is difficult to assess if this increase is from new victims or if the crime itself is increasing in frequency. It was noted that this is also believed to be due to more people feeling able to come forward and report the crime which was identified as a positive development.
- It was explained that the charity Women's aid had been secured through a tendering service to be in place for an additional five year.
- There were a small number of domestic homicide cases due to be published which represented serious long term case reviews.
- It was noted that there were a number of proposed voluntary schemes for perpetrators of domestic violence. Pilots for the schemes had been successful showing success rates of 50% in comparison to 5% for non-voluntary schemes. In addition the schemes had also been awarded funding for another 12 months to extend pilots by the PCC and the schemes had also generated interest within the west Mercia region.
- Engagement work was being carried out in schools and other areas to promote health relationships.

The following key points were made in regard to anti-social behaviour and community cohesion, the final priority area of the CSP:

- There had been an increase in the number of antisocial behaviour cases reported.
- There had been an increase of 15% in the number of reported cases of hate crime, however this was considered to be largely positive trends in reporting than in the actual number of incidents.
- It was noted that of reported hate crimes, 30% of the victims had been Asian or Pakistani while these groups represent 4% of the population of Herefordshire.

- Work was being done in the area of community cohesion, noting that there was a monthly task group which looked to address issues in this area from a multi-agency perspective.
- In the last 12 months work had been done according to the Prevent, anti-radicalisation agenda between Herefordshire Council and the CSP to supervise individuals at risk of radicalisation.

There was discussion of areas of the CSP which it might be beneficial to conduct further scrutiny work. The cabinet member for economy and corporate services suggested that the CSP partners as well as representatives from the office of the Chief Constable, and the office of the PCC present to members in greater detail. It was noted that action plans were being developed in February and that funding from the office of the PCC for CSP activity would be subject to the results of the PCC elections on May 5 2016. The chairman agreed that this would be of benefit.

The Director of Children's Wellbeing suggested that work in child sexual exploitation by both the General Overview and Scrutiny Committee, as well as the health overview and scrutiny committee may be of benefit. In response the chair explained that potential options would be explored in greater detail following the meeting.

The chairman welcomed questions from members of the committee.

A member of the committee asked to what extent violent crime in Herefordshire was related to drugs. Superintendent Thomas explained that it cannot be underestimated that people carrying drugs may also carry weapons and that drug dealing also created conflict between individuals involved.

A member of the committee queried if the view that cannabis had a smaller impact on crime than alcohol was correct in Herefordshire. Superintendent Thomas explained that the impacts of class C drugs were considered comprehensively with numerous options considered. It was noted that there had been a recent increase in drug driving cases involving cannabis over the Christmas period. This was significant as traditionally drink driving was the greater issue over that period.

The vice chair made a number of queries regarding the provision of services for victims of domestic violence. Queries were made regarding the number of women's refuges in Herefordshire and the number of available beds. The vice chair also queried the installation of safe rooms in Herefordshire. It was explained that responses were limited due to security as some detailed information could not be disclosed. However it was explained that there is a single refuge in Herefordshire but that this part of a wider network across the west midlands. It was noted that while it is often beneficial to house victims outside of the county for safety reasons, there are times when Herefordshire has not had sufficient capacity to house victims. It was explained that safe rooms are available subject to a needs assessment, noting that there had been a number of requests in the previous year.

A member of the committee noted that the information on provision for domestic violence victims would make for a beneficial presentation for all members and commended the attention given to the area by the CSP. The director of children's wellbeing explained that the Health Overview and Scrutiny committee had recently done work in this area and noted the need to better communicate activity between committees.

The cabinet member for economy and corporate services explained that CSP action plans for 2015 were only given one year of funding. As such it was important that priority leads were able to show that money has been used wisely in order to ask for continued or additional funding.

A member of the committee queried the CSP's view on the balance between individuals and communities responsibilities

A member of the committee asked what advice could be given to members to better support police and CSP activity. Superintendent Thomas replied that ward member engagement remains important as a link to communities and it varies between communities in which ways this can be effective. The example of cooperation with the relevant ward member during a murder enquiry in Herefordshire was provided as an example of success.

A member of the committee asked how well information was shared between CSP partners. The cabinet member for economy and corporate services acknowledged that there had been issues with the availability of information which had now been resolved. It was explained that by the end of 2016, new tracking tools would be in place allowing greater access to data. It was noted that currently the most recent data available on re-offending was from 2013 and that this would be alleviated with the new systems. The cabinet member for economy and corporate services acknowledged that there had been issues with the availability of information which had now been resolved.

A member of the committee queried if there was a danger associated with the success of the current CSP for gaining additional funding. It was asked, as Herefordshire is a relatively low crime authority and the CSP had delivered on a number of its priorities, was there a danger that a new PCC may reallocate funding to areas which were failing instead of Herefordshire. The cabinet member for economy and corporate services explained that this possibility had been discussed. However there was confidence that a new PCC would want to be associated with success, and as such fund and continue to support areas that were already successful.

Resolved

That:

- a) it be recommend that an all member briefing be arranged on the CSP and related matters including the office and Police and Crime Commissioner, Chief Constable, the Superintendent of Herefordshire and other CSP partners.**
- b) that the chair and vice chair investigate what areas of the CSP it may be of benefit to conduct further scrutiny work.**

63. OVERVIEW OF STRATEGIC HOUSING DOCUMENTS

The chairman introduced the item stating that the provision of affordable housing was vital to all communities. It was noted that homelessness is a persistent problem so it was positive to note that bed and breakfast accommodation had not been used in three years. The chairman expressed the importance of allocation policies and commented on the proposals for the SHYPP contract.

The cabinet member for adult's health and wellbeing explained that housing was of significant importance for young people. It was explained that the housing strategies would be received by cabinet in March and the comments of the committee would be welcomed.

The director of adult's wellbeing addressed the issue of the SHYPP contract advising the committee of the process being undertaken.

The director introduced the report explaining that housing has become a central element of national government policy only very recently. While the housing strategy was being developed there were major policy statements by national government which needed to be reflected in the strategy. It was not clear that the changes to national policy had been completed and this meant the housing strategy was in a draft form in order to be adaptive.

The joint commissioning manager summarised a number of key areas of the report identifying the legal status of each of the strategies:-

- The Housing Strategy is no longer a legal requirement but as it identifies key themes, including those requiring joint working with major parties, such as the NHS and Registered Providers (housing associations), its role was to prioritise areas of activity to meet required outcomes.
- The Homelessness Review and Strategy is a statutory document which focuses on measures to prevent and relieve homelessness
- The Allocation Policy is a statutory document which seeks to ensure that social and affordable housing is allocated to those in housing need in a fair and transparent manner.

It was explained that in developing the strategies there had been a considerable amount of joint working with various providers. There had been a number of workshops and a larger consultation event in the autumn which had been popular and very productive with 60-70 attendees at the Housing Strategy event. The Homelessness Strategy and the Allocations Policy had been discussed widely with service providers and partners.

A summary of the key national changes was provided. These included:

- Statutory reduction in social housing rents by 1% per annum for four years from April 2016 limiting the revenue available to social housing providers.
- Reduction in the obligations on housing developers to provide affordable housing on larger schemes
- Reduction in the benefit cap to £20,000, extension of shared accommodation rates for housing benefit applicants to under 35 year olds and loss of automatic right to housing benefit for 18-21 year olds
- Legislation now requires landlords to ensure that tenants have the right to remain in the country. This is predicted to impact negatively on the willingness of private landlords to house some households.
- A central government scheme to build 'one for one' social houses lost under the right to buy was undersubscribed.

It was explained that these changes were likely to reduce the resources available to social housing providers. As a result social housing providers would be less likely to build new social housing in the near future.

It was noted that many of the legal changes simultaneously made the construction of private housing more attractive and social housing less attractive. As a result, social housing providers may instead invest in that sector.

Social housing rents remain affordable for the majority of service users but the withdrawal of housing benefit entitlement was likely to have a consequent impact on those in the 18-21 age group who may face an increased risk of homelessness, particularly in the case of young people leaving care, pregnant mothers and those with children.

It was explained that the documents presented to the committee represented four separate strategies and that of the four, the Housing Strategy took a broader view and contained some broad analysis. A number of key priorities were identified:

- support for housing development particularly where social housing was provided
- Ensuring Travellers' sites had sufficient pitches (in cooperation with planning)
- Considering the implications of the university project and having the ability to provide student accommodation as the project develops.
- Improving housing quality, focusing on affordable warmth due to the significant impact of the quality of housing on the health of older people
- Investigating joint working as a response to reduced resources.

The joint commissioning manager summarized key points of the homelessness review and strategy. It was noted that within the report a number of successes are identified:

- Bed and breakfast accommodation for homeless households had not been used by the authority in over three years.
- The provision of temporary accommodation had reduced by 67% representing a significant achievement.
- Work had been done with street based interventions targeting rough sleepers and targeting individuals facing immediate homelessness on discharge from hospital.
- National changes previously identified were presenting new threats to homelessness, notably new groups were becoming at risk of homeless.
- Aimed to prevent homelessness through intervention at critical moments and to provide long term solutions.

The joint commissioning manager summarised key issues in the draft Allocation Policy, which also included the Tenancy Strategy.

It was explained that policy had been revised previously reducing the number of people on the housing register from 5000 to 500. This had subsequently increased to over 900. While the intention had been to reduce the numbers on the register to reflect housing need more adequately it had not been expected to have such a significant effect.

Many of the changes in the draft policy reflected the requirements of the 1996 Housing Act and the technical difficulties involved was stressed.

It was noted that the allocations policy reflected the reduction in direct responsibility and resources of local authorities with regard to affordable rented housing. It was noted that the local authority was limited in some instances to trying to influence the behaviours of social housing providers rather than being able to require specific actions.

A Representative of the Marches Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP) provided a number of observations on the provision of social housing:

- Welfare reform is ongoing at a national level and that it was positive to see practical changes in this regard. However it was explained that this would have consequences for the work of social housing providers.
- The ability of local authorities to influence and direct private social housing providers was decreasing
- There was expected to be a 17% reduction in the income of social housing landlords.
- Welfare reform was expected to increase the demand for social housing, however this was also expected to reduce the supply of social housing available which was a major concern.

- As Housing Associations were facing difficulties in building new social housing, and rents for social housing were being reduced by central government it was argued that social housing providers would retrench and offer a reduced service.
- It was unlikely that housing associations would build new social housing in the near future, and as a result social housing targets would need to be reviewed and an additional increase in homelessness be considered.
- Welfare reform was likely to reduce the amount of money available for families using social housing and the introduction of universal credit was likely to negatively impact on the ability of housing associations to provide social housing.
- It was concluded that due to the extent of these changes and their negative impacts on the housing associations it was likely that housing providers would instead invest into other sectors.

In response to a query from the chairman, the representative of the Marches LEP argued that it was unlikely that there would be additional funding given by central government to support social housing as this did not meet their current priority of generating starter homes for purchase.

Members of the committee noted that average weekly wages were low in Herefordshire, and that the county was low in rankings for the availability of rental homes which could mean that Herefordshire would be adversely affected by changes in social housing.

The Chairman queried how the housing strategies would influence the services provided by the Supported Housing for Young People Project (SHYPP). In response the director of Adults Wellbeing explained that in light of reductions in central government funding, every service commissioned by Herefordshire Council was being scrutinised and reviewed. This included the services provided by SHYPP. It was explained that by investigating the SHYPP contract, it was identified that areas of the service should be funded by the Department for Work and Pensions, not Herefordshire Council and so an administrative change in the way this service was provided was being considered. This would not represent a budget cut for the SHYPP service. Discussions with SHYPP and the organisation of which they were a subsidiary were ongoing.

The chairman queried how the strategies affected asylum seekers and refugees. In response it was explained that Herefordshire council had made a proposal for a small number of individuals under the category of Syrian refugees to be housed in Herefordshire. Refugees would be coming from refugee camps in the middle-east as opposed to those who had travelled to Europe independently.

It was clarified that Syrian refugees would be likely to come in family groups. Work was being done to identify suitable housing in Herefordshire to facilitate this.

It was noted that accepting refugees would be criticised for reducing the amount of housing available for non-refugees.

The chairman queried the work being done to generate student accommodation. In response it was explained that discussions with planning were ongoing.

The chairman thanked contributors and invited members of the committee to ask questions.

A member of the committee noted the extent of technical complexities presented by recent national changes.

The vice chairman queried the inclusion of council owned housing stock in the strategies. In response it was explained that Herefordshire council itself is not a holder of

housing stock. While large social housing providers are worked with closely, Herefordshire council housing strategies do not directly affect them.

There was discussion of the housing of refugees. It was noted that while it had been stated that accommodating refugees was likely to draw criticism this would also receive support from many residents of Herefordshire. In response the joint commissioning manager noted that criticism had also been received for not doing enough in this regard. Members of the committee also noted that a number of groups had offered to support the council in housing refugees.

A number of members queried issues relating to fuel poverty and housing.

- It was queried to what extent were issues of fuel poverty linked to low levels of income in Herefordshire, and in addition how much of this was linked to poor quality housing stock. In response it was explained that as well as housing stock, the rural nature of Herefordshire was also an issue. It was noted that in rural areas, access to mains gas can be limited, leading to increased fuel prices.

A member of the committee queried the extent to which mental health and other related services were working in cooperation with social housing providers. In response it was explained that there were structures in place to facilitate close cooperation, notably joint working had been undertaken with Addaction on drug use and homelessness.

A member of the committee queried the distribution of temporary accommodation over the county. In response it was explained that the majority of temporary accommodation provided was in Hereford, but that there was accommodation in market towns which had been acquired more recently. It was agreed that a written response would be given to additional queries from a member of the committee.

A member of the committee queried the type of starter homes which would be likely to be generated as a result of changes in government policy. It was explained that in large part this would depend on the choices of the developer, there was not likely to be a standardised product offered.

It was agreed that a written response would be provided regarding a member of the committee's query regarding the spread of social housing, and also the projected impact of imposing a community infrastructure levy on housing developments across Herefordshire.

64. WORK PROGRAMME

It was noted that this item had been deferred from the previous meeting of the committee held on 19 January 2016 at 10.00 am.

The committee considered and agreed the scoping statement for the community infrastructure levy task and finish group. The membership of the committee was agreed as Cllrs Bartlett, Johnson, and Hardwick. Cllr Harvey was appointed as the chairman of the task and finish group.

The committee received the executive response on the future of the smallholdings estate (county farms).

A member of the committee requested that the forward plan be included in documents for work programme items on future agendas of meetings of the committee.

65. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

Tuesday 8 March 2016 at 10.00 am.

The meeting ended at 5.00 pm

CHAIRMAN