

MEETING:	Overview and Scrutiny Committee - Sustainable Barnsley Workstream
DATE:	Tuesday, 8 February 2022
TIME:	2.00 pm
VENUE:	Council Chamber, Barnsley Town Hall

MINUTES

Present

Councillors Ennis OBE (Chair), Bowler, Cain, K. Dyson, Fielding, Frost, Gollick, Green, Hayward, Lodge, Lowe-Fiello, Markham, Mitchell, Noble, Osborne, Richardson, Risebury, Tattersall, Wilson and Wraith MBE.

44 Apologies for Absence - Parent Governor Representatives

No apologies/Apologies for absence were received in accordance with Regulation 7(6) of the Parent Governor Representatives (England) Regulations 2001.

45 Declarations of Pecuniary and Non-Pecuniary Interest

There were no declarations of pecuniary or non-pecuniary interest.

46 Minutes of the Previous Meeting

The minutes of the meeting held on 11th January 2022 were received.

47 Violent Crime in Barnsley

The following witnesses were welcomed to the meeting:

Paul Brannan, Head of Safer Barnsley, Bernaslai Homes
 Phil Hollingsworth, Service Director Safer Stronger Healthier Communities, BMBC
 James Aaby, Detective Chief Superintendent, South Yorkshire Police
 Paul Ferguson, Superintendent, South Yorkshire Police
 Ian Bailey, Violence Reduction Unit Partnership Manager, South Yorkshire Police
 Rosemary Clewer, Senior Commissioning Manager, BMBC (VIRTUAL)
 Wendy Lowder, Executive Director Adults and Communities, BMBC (VIRTUAL)
 Cllr Jenny Platts, Cabinet Spokesperson Adults and Communities, BMBC

Cllr Platts introduced the report, providing the Overview & Scrutiny Committee (OSC) with an update on the work of the Community Safety Partnership and South Yorkshire Violence Reduction Unit in Barnsley towards tackling violent crime and its impact on the communities of Barnsley. The report outlined the current performance against priorities and the governance arrangements in place. Cllr Platts reiterated that Barnsley is generally a safe place to be and everything is being done to ensure this continues.

In the ensuing discussion and in response to detailed questioning and challenge the following matters were highlighted:

Operation Sceptre is a nationwide week of intensive action which focuses on raising awareness of knife crime and police activity to tackle the issue. This took place in Barnsley and across South Yorkshire in December 2021, with targeted activity and operations to disrupt criminal activity and knife crime whilst raising awareness of knife crime and the devastating effects it can have on families and the wider community. Although there is heightened activity for Operation Sceptre, this works continues throughout the year every day, with dedicated teams that look to disrupt this activity, to educate and stop knife crime in our communities. Drug taking and anti-social behaviour were the targets as officers from South Yorkshire Police took to the streets of Barnsley town centre for a proactive operation in September 2021. Operation Sidewinder saw the Barnsley Central Neighbourhood Policing Team out and about, a drugs dog. The operation saw numerous officers providing a high-visibility presence in the town centre and the sniffer dog hard at work locating people with drugs in their possession. Operation Sentinel took place last Saturday (and every month) and saw officers mingling discretely amongst the general public in the Town Centre, looking out for vulnerable people and potential offending behaviour.

It was acknowledged that although there has been a stabbing in Monk Bretton recently, knife crime is relatively low. Nonetheless, trends and patterns are monitored and targeted pieces of work take place when necessary. There has been a rise in knife crime across South Yorkshire but Barnsley is not experiencing this at the moment. Support and advice is in place across schools to reduce levels of threat and there are a number of programmes aimed at 11-16 year olds aimed at deterring young people from crime. Street Smart in Locke Parke is a good example of how this type of approach is successfully reaching young people in Barnsley. This type of work starts in primary schools with PCSOs, linked in to Headteachers and pastoral staff, and increases as children get older, with a targetted approach where necessary and appropriate. Some of the programmes are led by armed officers who talk to teenagers about the perils of weapons, drugs etc., in consultation with teaching staff. There is on average around 20 to 25 knife incidents per month (over the last three months), but this should be kept in context as there is a balance between reactive and proactive work – if more proactive searches take place, more knives and weapons will be found but this does not necessarily equate to an increase in crime. For example, a frequent scenario is a builder who turns up for work with a knife and is stopped by Police as part of a stop and search operation. ‘Stop and search’ is a contentious issue with polarised views. During the 4 months between October and January, 784 searches took place, with action taken in 1 in 5.

Members were aware of serious anti-social behaviour incidents which had taken place in their wards and which seem to be ignored by Police despite there being video evidence of the incidents. This leads to frustration and deters residents from reporting it. It was acknowledged that video evidence is particularly valuable and reporting should always be followed up. Similar experiences were reported when using the 111 service. It is essential that public confidence in reporting crime improves. Problems experienced in Bank End, Worsborough, are finally coming to a resolution after 3 years. Police have used a structured methodological approach to resolving this situation – understanding what is driving the problem, working with

different agencies over a sustained period using a problem solving approach. Benefits take time to bear fruit and communication with residents is key.

It was acknowledged that poverty and deprivation drive many crimes, which is why the Area Team approach was introduced four years ago. Community Wardens were introduced to reinforce the feedback link back into communities, to foster engagement and build relationships in the community between BMBC, the Police, Elected Members and communities and has been working well. Communication is always a challenge as lots of information is received and it is essential that it is followed up and fed back at the right time. Various means of communication are used, including social media community alerts and newsletters.

Operations are not confined to the town centre. In November more than 130 officers came together with partners and took part in Operation Duxford across the whole of Barnsley to pro-actively tackle criminality and engage with the local community. As part of the operation 12 arrests were made for offences ranging from drugs and possession of a firearm to burglary and theft and harassment and racially aggravated assault; 27 stop and searches were carried out; 8 vehicles were seized under Operation Takeaway, knives and other dangerous weapons were taken off the district's streets; 25 hotspot visits took place, support was offered at 3 pop up police stations and 65 members of the public were signed up to the Smart Water property protection scheme. The Safer Streets Home Office initiative brought in £500k to spend on extra CCTV in the Dearne to target burglary and this has had a positive impact on other crime. Grant funding will be made available to local authorities to look at combatting violence against women and girls, looking at engagement and education. Problems around fear of attack at Locke Park were identified and BMBC are investing in better lighting to combat fear of crime. A coordinator has been appointed to combat the rise in fear and mistrust of the Police from young women, taking elements from the national strategy and plan to develop Barnsley's own plan. This is an area of focus going forward and tangible measures will be put in place to turn around mindsets and perceptions so that women and girls feel safe and supported.

Drug production and increased drug use and drug related violence, particularly amongst young people, has been linked to organised crime locally, regionally, nationally and globally, and poses a significant threat to communities. Significant work is taking place across the Borough to target organised criminals, along with a national process for understanding and mapping organised crime. It is known that organised crime groups come into the UK from different global communities, but the problem is no worse in Barnsley than elsewhere.

Barnsley has recently seen 42 positive disruptions of organised crime groups - some at a relatively low level and some of a more serious nature. Drug production activities have been dismantled and continue to be monitored. 34 cannabis cultivations ('farms') were detected within the last year, with £1m of drug production disrupted and £0.5m of cash proceeds obtained. South Yorkshire Police have been working very closely with the Home Office around serious organised crime tactics, which is given priority as it is seen as presenting a risk of significant harm to society.

It was felt by a Member that cannabis and synthetic drugs such as 'spice' are increasingly seen as part of a 'normal' night out, which is a cause for concern.

However, this has to be tempered against an exploration of what is 'problem' drug use and the reasons why people take drugs, which could be to drown out previous unresolved life experiences. Project ADDER is a national initiative which combines targeted law enforcement against criminal gangs with improved treatment and recovery services. Although Barnsley is not one of the pilot sites, learning from the initiatives will be taken on board. Levels of drug treatment and support offered are monitored quarterly and compared to other areas through the Safer Barnsley Partnership Board.

The Police work closely with Berneslai Homes around eviction of problem tenants for problem drug use and crime. This course of action removes the risk of harm from that area and broadcasts the wider message that crime doesn't work. This is a continuous war and is intelligence led, with responsibility placed on everyone within the community, from members of the public, staff, reporting through Crimestoppers and local Councillors. It was explained that anybody evicted from a property is entitled to housing support and advice so the Local Authority would be aware of their location, although evidence suggests that people tend to stay within the same community as they have been removed from. It is a matter of getting the balance right. The level of action taken has to be proportionate, must demonstrate that everything has been done to try to resolve the situation and to identify the impact on the surrounding community. Partial closure orders are often used rather than eviction. It is important that children and young people know the potential implications of their behaviour and that their parents may be evicted, which can be a sufficient deterrent. A dedicated officer works with private landlords to make sure they are aware of their responsibilities around drugs and allowing criminal activity in their properties. Criminal cases are brought to court regardless of tenure, but responsibility for penalties lies within the judicial system.

It was reported that the night time economy in the town centre effectively 'died' during the pandemic but when public houses etc., opened back up there was an increased incentive to tackle crime together using a multi-pronged approach, which included working with door staff, identifying potential domestic abuse situations and drug use, combatting under-age drinking, provision of plastic glasses and use of CCTV to make the town centre a safer place to be. 15 crime 'hotspots' were identified across South Yorkshire and only one was in Barnsley Town Centre. Barnsley town centre has successfully achieved the Purple Flag award for the third consecutive year. Lots of new venues are opening within the Town Centre but assurances were given that there are enough resources to police this effectively. Every weekend uniformed officers from the police and other services are on patrol and are using tracking devices and other technology to ensure this is effective. Designing out crime was part of the town centre planning, which includes anti-terrorism features.

Members have themselves been subject to physical attacks and verbal abuse. Barnsley launched its No Place For Hate campaign in July 2021, which aims to stamp out online abuse in the hope that it can make social media a more friendly place and to eradicate hate speech from social media platforms. Hate crime includes verbal abuse, which can quickly escalate to violence. Hate crimes are scrutinised through the neighbourhood policing teams when reported and proactive work in schools takes place to encourage reporting. Regular meetings with the Iman take place at the Mosque, which has been subject to attacks in the past. A new Communications Manager is looking at ways of addressing hate crime and violent

crime (including domestic abuse) using social media and other means. Members of the LGBT+ community and minority groups must be encouraged and empowered to report hate crime. Cruelty towards animals will always be thoroughly investigated and perpetrators prosecuted.

Members were encouraged to be the 'eyes and ears' within their communities and to encourage residents to be vigilant and always report suspicions to the police, as this can help to combat crime and make everyone feel safe.

RESOLVED that

- (i) Witnesses be thanked for their attendance and contribution and for their hard work within the communities of Barnsley;
- (ii) Performance information around knife crimes and levels of drug treatment and support should be provided to the Committee; and
- (iii) Elected Members should continue to encourage communities to report suspicious activity.

Chair