

Minutes of the West Belfast District Policing and Community Safety Partnership

Policing Committee Meeting

Conor Room, City Hall

Tuesday, 24th May 2016

Political Members

Councillor Stephen Magennis (Chair)
Councillor Matt Garrett
Alderman Frank McCoubrey

Independent Members

Liz Groves (Vice-Chair)
Breige Brownlee
Claire Canavan
Eoin McShane
Lauren Slane

PSNI Representatives

Chief Insp Norman Haslett PSNI

Staff Present

Alan Wardle, Safer City Coordinator
Katharine McCrum, Partnership Support Officer

Apology

Councillor Brian Heading

1. Welcome and Routine Matters

- i. The Chair welcomed Members to the meeting and noted the apology provided.

2. Declarations of Interest

- i. Members were asked to declare any material interests which they may have in relation to any item of business to be considered during the meeting.
- ii. No declarations of interest were noted.

3. West Belfast DPCSP Minutes & Matters Arising

- i. The Minutes of the West Belfast DPCSP Policing Committee Meeting held on 24th March, copies of which had previously been circulated, were taken as read and agreed as correct.
- ii. There were no matters arising from the minutes.

4. Emerging Issues

Chairs Update

- i. The Chair advised Members that prior to the meeting, he and other (D)PCSP Chair and Vice-Chairs had met with Chief Superintendent Chris Noble to discuss the number of recent shootings across the City, particularly in North and West Belfast. At this meeting Mr Noble advised that additional resources had been secured until June in order to have a more visible presence in these areas.

- ii. He advised Members that a number of the shootings had been by arrangement with those responsible demanding money in order to avoid the attacks. The shootings were mostly carried out by dissident republicans who were reportedly combating drug dealing, however it appeared to be more financially driven. Due to fear amongst the victims, few details were being passed to police however rallies held by the community had been well attended.
- iii. The Chair suggested that a visible and engaging police service could combat the increasing levels of fear and improve confidence. He pointed out that the community did not differentiate between the different policing teams but saw the PSNI as one service therefore it was important that a vacuum was not allowed to develop as this would lead to an increase in gangs, anti-social behaviour, drug use and shootings.
- iv. He added that it was important for each of the statutory agencies to play their part as the PSNI could not solve the issues alone.
- v. Chief Inspector Norman Haslett thanked the Partnership for their support and comments regarding the role that other agencies needed to take on. He advised Members that there were 3 key issues concerning him at present; the number of shootings, anti-social behaviour and the use of prescription drugs.

Shootings

- vi. Members were advised that between 1st October 2015 and 1st May 2016, 13 shootings had taken place within Belfast, 8 in West Belfast, 4 in North Belfast and 1 in South Belfast, with most victims being males between 18-25 years old.
- vii. Chief Inspector Haslett confirmed that in direct response to this, additional resources had been secured, particularly for hotspots and at key times of the evening. He added that as well as additional police on the street, the operation would be intelligence and target driven. Members were advised that statistics would be provided at the next partnership meeting in order to show proactivity.

Prescription Drug Use

- viii. Chief Inspector Haslett noted that this issue had been highlighted in the media recently following the death of an 18 year old from Ballymurphy who had taken a cocktail of alcohol and prescription drugs. He informed Members that he shared community concerns regarding the increase in drug use, and advised of some recent searches which had uncovered large amounts of cannabis, cocaine and prescription drugs. He added that arrests alone would not curb drug usage given its supply and demand nature. He suggested that education and safety messages needed to be widely promoted.

Anti-Social Behaviour

- ix. Members were advised that the 2 preceding weekends had been quieter in the key areas, which given the good weather, pointed to the positive work from community representatives, park wardens and the PSNI. Chief Inspector Haslett advised that the PSNI had been utilising their evidence gathering truck and would continue with efforts to reduce anti-social behaviour. He also advised that merging of the Neighbourhood and Local Policing Teams would ensure a consistent response to such issues.

Members Comments

- x. A Member welcomed the focus on prescription drugs given the recent deaths of 2 young people. She advised that details of houses selling drugs and alcohol had been passed to

the police however they had advised that no action could be taken as items could be for personal use.

- xi. The use of the evidence gathering truck was also welcomed however it was noted that the reduction of anti-social behaviour at Bog Meadows was due to patrols operated by residents and that this was not sustainable.
- xii. Members discussed the lack of action by the Ulster Wildlife Trust who owned the site. It was suggested that a formal letter was needed from the Partnership in order for them to take responsibility for the area. The Safer City Coordinator advised that he had made contact with the Trust who appeared willing to assist but were unaware of what steps to take. He added that a meeting was scheduled during June to further progress this.
- xiii. Chief Inspector Haslett advised that with regards to the houses selling drugs and alcohol, he would look into the reports and take action if possible.
- xiv. Members discussed the continuing issues in Falls Park and agreed that alternative activities needed to be found for the 200+ young people involved. It was suggested that the PCSP may have a role in lobbying for additional resources, or to encourage other agencies to take action given that many providers were not available at key times (evenings and weekends). It was also suggested that the actions being undertaken by the police, including the recently approved resources, needed to be promoted.
- xv. Chief Inspector Haslett advised that a meeting was to take place on 25th May to discuss the operation which would include communications officers and so media options would be discussed as part of this.
- xvi. With regards to a query about sharing information on drug seizures, Chief Inspector Haslett advised that information was shared via social media however the police had no way to ensure the uptake of stories by other media sources.
- xvii. At the suggestion of a Member, Chief Inspector Haslett agreed to explore making contact with GP's to ask them to report patterns of repeated early refills prescriptions which may be an indication of onward supply. He noted that 4 drugs bins were currently in place and that protocols were being sent to pharmacists as part of a Locality Planning Exercise in Ballymurphy.
- xviii. Members discussed the need for drug information leaflets to signpost people to appropriate support services. It was noted that pharmacists were becoming nervous and had started to request time safes.
- xix. A Member welcomed the letter circulated to residents following burglaries in the Riverdale area. He also questioned what was being done about the sale of prescription drugs on Facebook pages and a poster campaign attacking the PSNI and those willing to work with the police.
- xx. Chief Inspector Haslett advised that he was not aware of the posters but would follow up on this. He advised that the public should report drug dealing sites to Facebook who would then shut them down.
- xxi. With regards to key contacts now that additional PSNI Officers would be on duty, Chief Inspector Haslett suggested that the Neighbourhood Sergeant would continue to be the best contact, and that as the Local Policing Chief Inspector, he was always available in an emergency.

xxii. In closing a Member commented that despite the sombre mood in the area, the previous few weeks had been positive for police and community relations, even amongst those who may still have reservations about the PSNI. Chief Inspector Haslett welcomed these comments.