

Minutes of the Belfast Policing and Community Safety Partnership

Policing Committee

Lavery Room, City Hall
Monday 12th September, 2016

Political Members

Councillor John Hussey (Chair)
Councillor Janice Austin
Councillor Matt Garrett
Councillor Brian Heading
Councillor JJ Magee
Councillor Geraldine McAteer
Alderman Jim Rodgers
Alderman Tommy Sandford

Independent Members

Susan Russam (Vice-Chair)
Mary Lambe
John Loughran
Carmel McKinney
Michael O'Hara

PSNI Representative

Chief Superintendent Chris Noble, PSNI

Staff Present

Alison Allen, Safer City Assistant Manager
Denise Smith, Safer City Coordinator
Katharine McCrum, Partnership Support Officer

Apologies

Councillor Nuala McAllister
Alderman Tommy Sandford
Debbie Hammill
John MacVicar
Anne-Louise Toal

1. Welcome and Apologies

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

2. Declarations of Interest

- i. The Chair advised Members that they were required to declare any material interests that they may have in relation to any items on the agenda.
- ii. No declarations of interest were recorded.

3. Awareness Raising Session

(Mrs Amanda Mulholland, NIPB, attended in relation to this item)

- i. Mrs Amanda Mulholland, the NI Policing Board Officer responsible for PCSPs, provided Members with information on the roles and responsibilities of Policing Committee Members, the areas for improvement identified by the Criminal Justice Inspection Northern Ireland (CJINI) Report, and asked Members for their views on how the Committees could be most effective.
- ii. Members were reminded that the Policing Committee has statutory authority for monitoring police performance, providing views to the PSNI Commander and NI Policing Board, as well as gaining the cooperation and enhancing public confidence in policing.

- iii. Members were also advised that the legislation governing Policing Committees did not preclude the attendance of Statutory Designated Organisations however this was for Partnerships to discuss how engagement between the two was achieved.
- iv. With regards to the monitoring function of the Policing Committee, Mrs Mulholland advised that this must be carried out on a quarterly basis and that additional thematic reports could be requested from the PSNI if required.
- v. Members were advised that the Code of Practice recommended that the Policing Committee facilitate 2 public meetings per year on specific policing issues, 1 of which should focus on police performance. It was suggested that these could be delivered jointly with the Policing Board
- vi. Mrs Mulholland stated that the NI Policing Board was aiming to reinvigorate the relationships between the Board and PCSP Policing Committees through various means as they believed the structures were currently being underutilised. She added that Policing Committees needed to be fit for purpose to run alongside the Community Planning Framework.
- vii. Referencing the recommendations from the Fresh Start and CJINI Reports, Members were asked to advise the Board of any support or capacity needs, and to provide any suggestions for improved working.

Members Questions

- viii. A Member advised that his views regarding the autonomy of each DPCSP were already on record, as was the need to retain separate meetings of the Policing Committee in order to deliver the statutory responsibility of monitoring police performance.
- ix. A Member suggested that it would be useful to hold other statutory bodies to account over what they were doing to tackle certain issues. It was agreed that information from the 7 statutory bodies was needed, however the current system was not working as few were providing updates during the designated agenda item.
- x. Another Member noted that the PCSP was a partnership and it was not for Members to scrutinise each other, but to add value to the work being delivered. It was suggested that the Partnership find a way to increase the importance of statutory bodies, such as quarterly presentations from each.
- xi. A Member added that public representatives could also be held to account over the work that they were doing.
- xii. A Member called for more engagement between PCSPs and the Policing Board and suggested bi-annual attendance at PCSP meetings.
- xiii. The Safer City Manager pointed out that the role of the Belfast PCSP's Policing Committee and those of the DPCSPs were different and that while reports from statutory partners had not always been provided, updates from the PSNI had been constant. She agreed to email each of the statutory partners about the importance of submitting regular update reports to the PCSP.
- xiv. A Member noted that the PCSP offered an excellent opportunity to get the best out of the partners around the table and deliver community safety outcomes for communities through the delivery of the Action Plan.

- xv. In terms of training needs, a Member suggested that the move to Outcome Based Accountability as part of the Program for Government may result in knowledge gaps within communities and so training on this would be useful.

4. Minutes

- i. The minutes of the Belfast PCSP Policing Committee Meeting held on 13th June, copies of which had previously been circulated, were taken as read and agreed as correct.

5. Update from PSNI Representative

Prolific Offenders

- i. Chief Superintendent Noble advised Members that the PSNI had recently doubled its operational force and suggested that Members may wish to hear more details about the work of various teams.
- ii. He also advised Members that there had been an increase in offending over recent weeks with two to three times more incidents than in the previous 3 months, and that the Reducing Offending Unit (ROU) were looking at these issues.
- iii. A Member commended the good work of the ROU but stated that there were gaps in the Criminal Justice System and that the support mechanisms needed to be improved, particularly inside prison, in order to break the cycle of unemployment, skills deficits and addiction issues.

Key Dates/Holidays

- iv. Members were advised that a plan was in place to deal with Freshers Week and Halloween, and that plans were underway for the Christmas period, further information about which could be brought to the next meeting of the Policing Committee.
- v. A Member commented that fireworks were already beginning to be thrown in the New Lodge area and so it was important to get to grips with the issue as soon as possible.

Breathalysers

- vi. A Member asked for an update following a road traffic accident in North Belfast at which those involved were advised that there were no working breathalysers available to test the person involved.
- vii. Chief Superintendent Noble advised that this was incorrect as plenty of breathalysers were available and that if responding Officers did not have a device with them, one could be brought to the scene. He advised that the incident was being investigated.

Stress and Sickness Levels

- viii. In response to a query about stress and sickness levels amongst Officers in Belfast, Chief Superintendent Noble advised that around 60 Officers were off with long term absences. He advised that two thirds of absences were due to musculoskeletal problems or stress, which was reflective of the working environment. He informed Members of the services available to Officers, including occupational health, and advised that face-to-face engagement was provided to assist in their return to work.

Resources

- ix. A Member asked if the PSNI had the resources to deliver safe and successful policing across Belfast.
- x. Chief Superintendent Noble advised that Belfast was one of the safest cities in the UK and Ireland and that current statistics were showing a positive year in terms of preventing crime, with domestic burglary down by 25% and vehicle crime down by 44%. He did however note the level of resources directed towards dealing with non-criminal issues such as anti-social behaviour, missing persons, vulnerable people and abandoned vehicles. He also advised that the PSNI were responding to approximately 20,000 calls per year on behalf of the Ambulance Service given their limited resources.
- xi. The Member then questioned the role of the PCSP in articulating these issues to which Chief Superintendent Noble suggested that case studies alongside the Health and Social Care Service were useful in exploring the challenges and offering the opportunity for a problem solving approach.
- xii. A Member asked if rehabilitation centres for young people were lacking. He also thanked the PSNI for their response to a robbery in East Belfast and commended the actions of a postman who intervened in a theft on the Sandown Road.
- xiii. Chief Superintendent Noble advised that the PSNI, Probation Board and community agreed in the need for rehabilitation however it was often hard to free up resources for this. With regards to the postman in question, he advised that the PSNI's thanks had been passed on both verbally and in writing.
- xiv. In response to queries about bail checks at key times of year, Chief Superintendent Noble advised that bail checks and enforcement were organised through Operation Seeker. He added that the PSNI did not want to impinge on people's private lives however the checks were in place for a reason.
- xv. A Member questioned what co-design pilot projects were in place to look at mental health issues and social services, and noted the importance of Community Planning in such interventions.
- xvi. Chief Superintendent Noble advised of 2 projects, the Alcohol Recovery Centre (ARC) aimed at easing pressures in A&E departments and on police, and the possibility of funding a Mental Health Nurse to assess, signpost and support vulnerable people encountered by Officers. He advised that there were challenges in primary care investment.
- xvii. A Member welcomed the useful and interesting discussions which had taken place regarding the PSNI report but noted that statistics did not show the full picture. He asked that a visual representation of a day or week in policing was provided within the next report.

6. Date of Next Meeting

- i. Members were advised that the next meeting of the Policing Committee would be held on Monday, 14th November.