

Minutes of the Belfast Policing and Community Safety Partnership

Policing Committee

Lavery Room, City Hall
Monday 14th November, 2016

Political Members	Independent Members
Councillor John Hussey (Chair)	Susan Russam (Vice-Chair)
Councillor Janice Austin	Debbie Hammill
Councillor Matt Garrett	Mary Lambe
Councillor Brian Heading	John Loughran
Councillor JJ Magee	Carmel McKinney
Alderman Tommy Sandford	Michael O'Hara

PSNI Representative	
Deputy Chief Constable Drew Harris, PSNI	Superintendent Melanie Jones, PSNI
Chief Superintendent Chris Noble, PSNI	

Staff Present	Apologies
Alison Allen, Safer City Manager	Councillor Nuala McAllister
Denise Smith, Safer City Coordinator	John MacVicar
Katharine McCrum, Partnership Support Officer	Anne-Louise Toal
	Helen Russell, NIHE
	Cecil Worthington, H&SCT

1. Welcome and Apologies

- i. The Chair welcomed Members to the meeting and noted the apologies provided. He also invited Deputy Chief Constable Drew Harris to the meeting and asked if he wished to brief the Partnership on any items of note.
- ii. The Deputy Chief Constable advised that he wished to attend in order to talk about the changing crime profile and the direction being taken by PSNI Headquarters in relation to issues of the Executive Office and those included in the Fresh Start Panel Report.
- iii. In response to a query regarding the Fresh Start Report, a change to the benefits system and possible impact on petty crime, Mr Harris advised that evidence suggested that theft was diminishing and had been for 10-15 years. He added that crime was now more complex and involved the abuse of vulnerable people, cyber crime, domestic violence and sexual crimes.
- iv. A Member questioned the overlap in call handling services and how calls were prioritised.
- v. The Deputy Chief Constable advised that over 500,000 service calls were received each year and that from this huge demand, 1 fifth related to crimes with the remaining calls relating to vulnerability or to support other agencies. Members were further advised that a 5 shift system ensured overlap, particularly during busy periods, and that pre-arranged diary calls were also scheduled.
- vi. He advised that calls involving vulnerabilities were prioritised by call handlers, but that demand would always outweigh supply.

- vii. A Member provided details of an incident which she felt was not handled correctly. Without knowing the specifics of the call the Deputy Chief Constable was unable to provide further information but agreed to look into the issue on her behalf.

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. Minutes

- i. The minutes of the Belfast PCSP Policing Committee Meeting held on 12th September, copies of which had previously been circulated, were taken as read and agreed as correct.
- ii. With regards to the actions from the previous meeting, the Chair advised that;
 - Statutory Partners had been reminded of the importance of submitting regular update reports,
 - Information on the work of specific PSNI teams would be provided from December onwards,
 - A brief on the PSNI's Christmas Operation would be provided during the next agenda item, and,
 - A visual representation, or demand wheel, representing police resources had been provided.

4. Update from PSNI Representative

Christmas Operation

- i. Chief Superintendent Noble advised Members that the Christmas Operation, which had been funded by Headquarters, would commence on 19th November and run until the end of December between the hours of 8am and 3am.
- ii. He advised that the operation would focus on Belfast City Centre and the main arterial routes and would include tackling drink driving and offering additional security, especially during particularly busy periods. Members were advised that support would also be offered to businesses both in the City and at out of town shopping centres.
- iii. He also advised Members that Body Worn Video would be available throughout the Christmas period and that media reassurances would be released regarding the additional visibility of Officers.

Demand and Resources

- iv. A Member welcomed the presentation of the demand wheel and suggested that the number of Officers available would also be a useful statistic to include.
- v. In response to a query regarding available resources, Chief Superintendent Noble advised that demand was outweighing the capacity of the PSNI however he did have the necessary resources to keep people safe.

5. Policing Demand

- i. Chief Superintendent Noble drew Members attention to the demand wheel which provided figures for one week of policing in Belfast City District. He added that this did not include additional security requirements or large scale events and so the resources needed for these were not visible.
- ii. He spoke about the importance of the Crime Progression and Reducing Offending teams in terms of having an impact on crime figures, and how the number of pro-active Officers had been doubled in recent months.
- iii. Superintendent Melanie Jones was invited to provide 4 examples of the work undertaken by the PSNI, which while being resource intensive, were not part of the core business of the Service:
 - Young People In Care – The PSNI receive numerous calls from care homes regarding young people going missing who are suspected of being at risk of death or serious harm. Due to various complex issues, and because young people can of course not be locked in, they can on occasion end up spending the night at a police station if they cannot be returned to the care home.
 - Mental Health Issues – PSNI Officers are often deployed to hospitals in order to safeguard staff and vulnerable patients presenting with mental health issues.
 - Supporting Care Leavers – On leaving care, young people are provided with supported accommodation. If they do not return to this accommodation, it is mandatory that they are reported missing, even though they may not be at risk. The PSNI are therefore often called to search for these people, which as well as being resource intensive, has a damaging effect on the relationship with these young adults.
 - Hospital Assessments following Arrests – Following arrests, suspects are often found to have vulnerabilities such as mental health or drug/alcohol issues. In order to be fit for interview, they are moved to hospitals for assessment and due to the often serious nature of the crimes involved, must be monitored by police throughout.
- iv. Chief Superintendent Noble added that up to 84% of police time was currently spent dealing with non-criminal issues. He noted that many communities felt that the PSNI have been removed from the streets and while this is not the case, increased pressure and demand may make it appear this way. It was suggested that the PCSP could assist in educating communities about these struggles and to assist in better partnership working with other agencies.
- v. A Member suggested that the Health Trusts needed to take responsibility for the provision of safe spaces for mental health assessments as there were currently no secure hospital beds in Northern Ireland. She added that there needed to be an examination of what a reasonable response was to 17 year olds in care.
- vi. A Member welcomed the presentation and expressed their shock at the statistics. He noted that the PSNI appeared to be policing vulnerability and poverty and so there was a need for a health intervention as this was not an effective use of the police budget.
- vii. In response to a query regarding how long the PSNI would be expected to deal with such cases, Chief Superintendent Noble advised that the police would not step away whilst they were needed however putting ethical pressure on other agencies would be

helpful. He added that he was happy to be challenged on policing issues however the same level of scrutiny did not seem to fall on others. Superintendent Jones added that it was not individual cases that were causing the problem, but the cumulative effect.

- viii. A Member questioned whether the PSNI could refer people to Family Support Hubs to which Chief Superintendent Noble confirmed they could.
- ix. A Member noted that community policing was the biggest asset to the PSNI and that Officers on the ground had been able to resolve issues and build confidence; however this had now been lost.
- x. Deputy Chief Constable Drew Harris noted that Policing with the Community had been central to the ethos of policing since the Patton Report and that whilst some areas no longer had Neighbourhood Policing Teams, critical areas of need had retained a number of teams. He added that he recognised people's desire to see police on the streets however crime was now more complex.
- xi. Mr Harris noted that the Ambulance Service were making over 8,000 service calls a year to the PSNI making them the biggest caller, however that was not to say that each of these calls were not justified and of a serious nature.

Comments Regarding Service

- xii. A Member passed on comments from a South Belfast community following a sudden death at which Officers were described as being very professional and offering a great deal of empathy and care.
- xiii. A Member provided an example of an incident in North Belfast where key local Officers had been hard to contact, and once one had been located, was found to be operating as a car park attendant at a football match. He also provided an example of a resident providing information to the PSNI but asking for no Officer to call at their door, only for this to occur.
- xiv. The Deputy Chief Constable agreed that routine issues such as this were easily avoided and went a long way to improving confidence. With regards to deployment of Officers, he advised that the new model would now enter an evaluation phase which would look at demand and staffing. He added that difficult decisions were likely needed in April, 2017 as further budget cuts were anticipated.

6. Date of Next Meeting

- i. Members were advised that the next meeting of the Policing Committee would be held on Monday, 16th January.