

Minutes of the East Belfast District Policing and Community Safety Partnership

Private Meeting

Room 203, City Hall,
Wednesday, 13th February, 2013

Political Members

Councillor Claire Hanna (Chair)
Councillor Mervyn Jones
Councillor Adam Newton
Councillor Niall O'Donnghaile
Alderman Gavin Robinson

Independent Members

Mr Mark Houston (Vice-Chair)
Mrs Lynda Gibson
Mrs Olwen Lyner
Mr Andrew Moorhead

Police Service of Northern Ireland Representative

Chief Inspector Mark McEwan, Area Commander

Staff Present

Eve Bremner, Safer City Manager
Lorna Somers, DPP Manager
Katharine McCrum, Partnership Support Officer

Apology

Councillor Deirdre Hargey
Mr Gareth Beacom

1. Welcome and Routine Matters

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

2. Declaration of Interests

- i. No declarations of interest were recorded.

3. Update on Policing in East Belfast

Flag Protests

- i. Chief Inspector McEwan advised Members that overall crime had decreased in East Belfast, however, due to ongoing flag protests and disorder, the Chief Inspector outlined how these factors would have to be taken into consideration in future statistics.
- ii. The Area Commander stated that he was aware of the detrimental impact that the ongoing disturbances were having on communities and businesses. He added that, as Saturday protests were ongoing, a continued heavy police presence would be necessary and while it was hoped that this footprint could be lightened, this would be dependent on need.
- iii. Members commended the Area Commander on the overall reduction in crime but commented on both the lack of confidence and respect for the PSNI and its Officers which was reaching 'rock bottom' and called for a proactive response to address these issues.
- iv. Chief Inspector McEwan agreed that confidence was at a low across the board and recognised the need for a local solution to restore relations between police and

communities. He advised Members that suggestions to achieve this were welcomed as solutions had not been forthcoming from other avenues.

- v. A Member stated that attempts had been made by community groups to meet with PSNI representatives, however, these offers had not been accepted.
- vi. The Area Commander confirmed that talks had taken place regarding this meeting and that the offer would be taken up. He added that attendance would need to be carefully considered but that a constructive meeting was important to allow the police to state their stance on certain issues.
- vii. In response to a Member's query regarding shift patterns, Chief Inspector McEwan confirmed that officers working in the Victoria Neighbourhood Policing Teams had returned to normal shift patterns and that Pottinger Teams would also return to normal following the scheduled parade in East Belfast on 23rd February, however weekly assessments on such decisions were ongoing.
- viii. The Chair commented upon the fact that building confidence in policing was a key objective of the DPCSP and therefore stated that the Partnership would be keen to support the police in such endeavours. It was subsequently suggested that gaining the cooperation of the public with the police become a standard agenda item.

Public Event Considerations

- ix. Members discussed the possible options for the Public Event, including the focus on drug misuse and the inevitable public desire to discuss the protest related issues.
- x. While it was initially suggested that the meeting should focus solely on the planned theme, Members felt that to ignore the protest issues would be detrimental to the credibility of the Partnership and that a question and answer session should be facilitated.
- xi. It was therefore agreed that a working group be convened to review the logistics of holding a meeting that would address both thematic and responsive issues. The Chair (if available), Lynda Gibson and Andrew Moorhead agreed to meet with staff to develop such a plan.
- xii. The DPP Manager advised Members that the date, time, venue and theme had been advertised in daily and local papers, on the PCSP Website, that posters would be distributed throughout the local community and that emails had been sent to various community safety databases.

Questions Submitted by Members of the Public

- xiii. The DPP Manager advised Members that questions had been received from a member of the public following the procedure used by the previous District Policing Partnership. She therefore asked Members how they wished to proceed in the absence of a policy regarding how the DPCSP deal with such questions.
- xiv. Members agreed that questions should be sent to the PSNI for response with answers then circulated to Members and the requester. It was further agreed that the questions and responses would not feature at the public event and that a formal procedure governing this should be developed which gives an equal voice to all partners involved in the DPCSP.

4. Procedures for Diversionary Funding

- i. The Chair introduced discussion regarding the recent allocation of diversionary money in East Belfast, acknowledging the need to develop firm procedures for allocating emergency funding in the future. She added that in order to deliver auditable, equitable criteria based funding, the process would need to be clear for all Members.
- ii. Several Members expressed concern at the process that had taken place to date and noted their lack of confidence in the Partnership as a result. Of particular concern was the time taken for the process to commence, the short notice in which decisions were required to be made in and a lack of response to queries from Officers. It was also noted that duplicate funding may have occurred.
- iii. In response to a further query regarding staffing, the DPP Manager advised Members that a job-share was in operation for East Belfast, and while leave and family circumstances had affected communication in previous weeks, during normal circumstances one or other of the officers should be available to answer all queries.
- iv. The Chair accepted this response but agreed to review Members issues with the DPP Manager should this become necessary. With regards to Members concerns regarding the allocation of funding, the Chair stated that she felt that the criteria and purpose had been met, but agreed that email responses were not an appropriate method for approval.
- v. The Safer City Manager agreed that the short timescales had caused major issues for staff and Members alike. She added that, as staff had been asked to act responsively and as matter of urgency, the Partnership and in particular the Chair, may have been exposed to issues of governance. She concluded by saying that responses to requests need to be timely but also realistic and stand up to financial audit.
- vi. Several Members felt unsure of the process and the email conversations that had taken place while others felt that decisions made by the DPCSP Members had been overturned during the process.
- vii. The DPP Manager clarified the timeline of events which, as no Members had responded to an initial email requesting feedback on received applications, led to the Chair making a decision guided by Officers rather than DPCSP Members.
- viii. The DPP Manager also explained that the deadline had been extended by a further two hours to allow for responses to be received from Members, but to no avail. She explained that concerns had been raised by officers at providing funding for respite care when diversionary activity had been the aim of the funding, although the need behind the project was understood. Members heard that four responses had been received in favour of the project in question, however, these came in after the decision had been made based on Officers suggestions and Belfast City Council procedures.
- ix. The DPP Manager further clarified that Members had approved the application form and the process which had been put in place and that the objective of having money in the community within one week had been achieved. She added that developing a protocol was important as applications for funding usually exceed the allocation and therefore a strong criteria based decision process would be needed in future.

- x. Members agreed that funding decisions would need to be made at a full Partnership level or by a delegated working group in the future. While many concerns were raised, it was agreed that the intention by all was to deliver good work and that this had been achieved.
- xi. The Chair thanked the DPP Manager for clarifying several issues and asked that Members consider how the Partnership would move forward with the current situation and the protocols for future emergency funding.
- xii. Several Members felt that refusing to fund an application because of questionable wording was a mistake and that the issue would need to be resolved. It was also mentioned that the wider community should benefit from such funding, not solely young people.
- xiii. Following clarification on the remaining East Belfast DPCSP budget, it was proposed that the Pitt Park Diversionary/Respite application receive funding.

Proposed: Linda Gibson

Seconded: Olwen Lyner

- xiv. Members welcomed the opportunity to fully consider the application following frank discussion of the process and clarification on the issues raised.
- xv. A Member commented upon the responsibility of Members to relay information to community groups effectively to ensure that wording does not become an issue in the future.

5. Other Items of Business

- i. In response to a Member's query regarding the time commitment required following completion of the 'Design Out Crime' Training, the DPP Manager stated that the consultant was currently meeting with staff regarding the training dates however the time commitment following certification was unknown and hard to predict.
- ii. A Member requested that clarification on the dates of future East Belfast DPCSP meetings be sent via email.