

**Minutes of the East Belfast District Policing and Community Safety Partnership
Public Meeting
East Belfast Network Centre, Templemore School
Thursday 27th June, 2013**

Political Members

Cllr Adam Newton (Chair)
Cllr Mervyn Jones
Ald Gavin Robinson

Independent Members

Mr Mark Houston (Vice-Chair)
Mrs Lynda Gibson
Mrs Olwen Lyner
Mr Gareth Beacom

Designated Organisations

Chief Insp. Mark McEwan, PSNI
Inspector Angus Mairs, PSNI
Inspector Gareth McCreery, PSNI
Sergeant Davy Scott, PSNI
Karl Dorris, NIFRS

Yvonne Adair, YJA
Yvonne Cowan, BHSCT
Pauline Smart, BELB
Jane Lappin, PBNI

Staff Present

Phyllis Anderson, Safer City Co-ordinator
Heather Horner, ASB Officer, East Belfast
Bernie Quinn, Project Officer
Paul Cleary, Safer Neighbourhood Officer
Tony Kelly, Safer Neighbourhood Officer

Apologies

Cllr Niall Ó Donnaghaile
Cllr Claire Hanna
Andrew Moorehead
Alice Mills, NIHE

1. Welcome

- i. The Chair, Councillor Adam Newton, welcomed members of the public to the meeting of the East Belfast District Policing and Community Safety Partnership (DPCSP), noted the apologies provided and invited the panel to introduce themselves to the public.
- ii. The Chair explained that the theme of the meeting was ‘Crime and Disorder: The long term impact on you and your community’ and that presentations would be made by various representatives from the PSNI. After the presentations, Members of the partnership and members of the public would have the opportunity to pose questions to the PSNI representatives.
- iii. The Vice-Chair also advised those present that there would be an opportunity to ask questions of the PSNI representatives in relation to other policing issues at the conclusion of the themed part of the meeting.

2. Presentation on ‘Crime and Disorder: The long term impact on you and your community’

- i. Chief Inspector McEwan introduced the topic ‘Crime and Disorder: The long term impact on you and your community’ in relation to both recent events in East Belfast and public disorder in general.

- ii. He explained that in policing public disorder there were three key issues to consider, communication, command control and the tactics used.
- iii. Chief Inspector McEwan stated that two-way communication between the PSNI and community representatives was a key issue in policing public disorder.
- iv. He explained that command control was a three tier process with Gold command being the strategic level responsible for setting acceptable parameters; Silver command, Chief Inspector rank or higher, agreeing the tactics and Bronze command on the ground ensuring that appropriate resources were deployed as required.
- v. Inspector McCreery from the Tactical Support Group (TSG) stated that, all TSG tactics were governed by strict rules and a code of ethics to ensure that the force used is lawful, necessary, proportionate and the minimum required in the circumstances.
- vi. The Inspector explained that all PSNI Officers were accountable for their actions.
- vii. He also explained that a risk assessment was always carried out before the TSG was deployed and the tactics agreed to achieve the Silver Commander's objectives.

3. Questions from DPCSP Members in relation to the theme

- i. In response to a question from a Member, Chief Inspector McEwan explained that recent events had highlighted the difficulties in maintaining effective communications in serious, complex situations but appreciated the role played by community representatives during these times.
- ii. The Chief Inspector stated that the Bronze command structure allowed for two Bronze commanders to operate at the same time, one responsible for public order and tactical decisions and the other endeavouring to keep lines of communication open with community representatives.
- iii. In response to a query concerning identification of Police Officers, a PSNI representative explained that landrovers used by the TSG had four identifying marks on them. Officers in the TSG had identification numbers on five different areas of their uniform/kit including their helmet or baseball cap and on their body armour and blue suits and these were checked for visibility by a senior officer before being deployed.
- iv. In response to a question from a Member, Chief Inspector McEwan replied that the PSNI were one of the most accountable forces in Europe and within the PSNI the TSG were the most scrutinised unit because of the context of the situations where they were mainly deployed
- v. A representative from the office of the Police Ombudsman for Northern Ireland (PONI) was in attendance and at the invitation of the panel explained that he was there as part of his commitment to come into communities and meet the public and explain how the complaints procedure worked. One of his aims was to build confidence between the Police Ombudsman and communities such as in inner east Belfast where contact with the PONI office had been low.

Regarding identification and accountability issues it was explained, that to make a complaint a member of the public didn't need a police officer's identification number

because video and photographic evidence could be used by the PONI office during its investigation in order to identify officers.

4. Questions from the public in relation to the theme

- i. In response to a question concerning the length of time video and photographic evidence was kept by the PSNI, Chief Inspector McEwan explained that if it related to an ongoing investigation it would be kept for the duration of that investigation. Otherwise, data protection laws dictated the length of time this type of evidence could be kept.
- ii. In relation to the make up of TSG units, Chief Inspector McEwan stated that neighbourhood police officers were not usually used as these officers were still required within their neighbourhoods. However, all police officers within the District and operational teams were trained to perform TSG duties and could be deployed to other Districts if required.
- iii. In response to a question about the length of time an investigation can take, the representative from the Police Ombudsman's office explained the timeline of an investigation and how, if there is an element of criminality, the complaint would be referred to the Public Prosecution Service which could cause the process to be delayed.
- iv. Once the investigation was complete a full report would be sent to the Northern Ireland Policing Board and the individual making the complaint would receive a letter containing a full explanation of the investigation and decision. A synopsis of the investigation would be published on the PONI website. Where the evidence supported it, a recommendation for disciplinary action would be made to the PSNI.
- v. A member of the public asked how the PSNI were going to restore confidence in policing with the local communities in East Belfast following the recent public disorder and "flag protests".
- vi. Chief Inspector McEwan agreed that this was a very important and challenging question. The PSNI would continue delivering what the community wanted by tackling drug crime, burglaries and anti-social behaviour in the area. He reminded everyone of how they were going about this by continuing searches for drugs and offensive weapons, supporting the installation of drug disposal bins in the area and by supporting the work of the Reducing Offending Unit. He added that one of the biggest challenges was making the public aware of the crime reduction work being done by the PSNI in East Belfast, so improving communication would be a major factor in restoring confidence
- vii. A Member of the DPCSP commented that most people in East Belfast supported the PSNI but their voice wasn't always heard against more vociferous elements.
- viii. In response to this question a Member of the DPCSP further added that opportunities for the public to meet and engage with the police such as tonight's Public Meeting would help to build confidence and respect between the local communities and the PSNI.
- ix. A Member of the DPCSP explained that Members of the Partnership would work with communities to rebuild confidence in policing and added that many of the Members did a lot of this work outside of their role within the DPCSP.

- x. In response to a member of the public, a Member of the DPCSP outlined the conference system in use for young people who had been arrested because of their involvement in flag protests and other public disorder. The PSNI and other agencies would meet the young person in conference and explain to them how their behaviour could impact on them, their family, their community and their future. The age of responsibility in law is 10 but the Youth Justice Agency and other agencies will do their best to keep the young person out of the justice system for as long as possible.
- xi. Chief Inspector McEwan informed the meeting that only 8 young people from East Belfast had been arrested for involvement in recent disturbances, not as big a number as the public may have perceived

5. Questions from the public in relation to other policing matters

- i. A member of the public raised the issue of the lack of visible policing in neighbourhoods. Inspector Mairs explained visible policing was important for re-assurance but that on occasion, patrols had to be focussed on “hotspot” areas if, for example, there had been a spate of burglaries or anti-social behaviour.
- ii. A member of the public asked if there was a particular pattern to recent deaths in East Belfast thought to be caused by drugs. Chief Inspector McEwan responded that there was nothing to suggest a link at this point and that he didn’t want to comment further because of the sensitivities surrounding this issue.

6. Written questions received from members of the public

Questions 1-6 Submitted by Mr John Collins

1. *In May of this year, a gun linked to dissident terrorists was recovered from the short strand. Can the commander tell me if any arrests were made, the type of gun, had the gun been used any previous attacks and which terrorist grouping were they linked to and which dissident grouping is the gun linked to now?*

Response

“This matter is currently under investigation by Crime Operations and as such it would be inappropriate to comment.”

2. *Which East Belfast Unionist elected representatives did the Area Commander & District Commander meet at the Cardiff talks?*

Response

“A broad spectrum of elected representatives from across Belfast attended the Cardiff talks.”

In response to a further enquiry, the Area Commander explained that the invitation was issued by the Assistant Chief Constable to the various political parties and it was a decision made by each party as to who should attend on their behalf.

3. *What knowledge or better understanding of East Belfast did the Area Commander gain from attending the Cardiff talks?*

Response

“Verbal response will be provided.”

Chief Inspector McEwan explained that he could not give specific details about the talks that had taken place in Cardiff, but stated that the talks focussed on policing public disorder and that the PSNI would engage with the community at all levels.

4. *Does the Area Commander have confidence in East Belfast PCSP?*

Response

“Yes.”

5. *Operation Dulcet - In B Division, how many of those individuals who have had their faces published by the Media/PSNI have the police spoken to and have faced no charges?*

Response

“One person who was identified via this means was released unconditionally.”

In response to a further enquiry, Chief Inspector McEwan stated that there was a criteria for processing of images and that these were only released to the media when all other methods had been exhausted and if the photographs were of minors the decision to release these would be taken at Assistant Chief Constable level.

6. *What is the minimum operational level for Neighbourhood policing in B Division and are those numbers protected?*

Response

“There is not a minimum operational level for neighbourhood policing in B District.”

Chief Inspector McEwan expanded by explaining that there were over 30 neighbourhood police officers within the area but that they may be extracted to undertake other duties or for Court appearances. The abstraction rate for neighbourhood police officers in East Belfast was less than 10%.

Questions 7 – 8 Submitted by Mr Philip O’Keeffe

7. *Could the police comment on its response to repeated daytime store robberies with threats of violence. My feeling is that there’s more to the quarterly mini-market robberies than meets the eye. Belfast business and commerce has been subject to vicious protection rackets for decades?*

Response

“Each robbery reported to Police is investigated, and all lines of enquiry are followed in order to identify a suspect. Robbery locations are briefed out to ensure all patrolling officers are aware of the issue.

Police are not aware of any links to protection rackets, but would encourage Mr O’Keeffe to bring any information he has to Police.”

8. *With reference to armed robberies at Campbell Park Avenue Post Office, a corner shop on Belmont Park (both now closed) and a local home bakery in the area, could the PSNI advise:*

i) Whether any of these serious crimes are ever cleared up by the police?

Response

“Yes. Within the past year, B District has set up a unit which targets prolific offenders who engage in criminal activities across a broad range of crime types. As a result we have seen a decrease in burglary and robbery offences and an increase in the number of offences being cleared.”

ii) Is there a local district policing board committee for east Belfast where senior police might be questioned by rates/tax payers, voters, residents, citizens?

Response

“East Belfast DPCSP meetings are held in public four times per year and members of the public may submit written questions prior to the meeting which will be responded to by the PSNI.”

iii) Is a good insurance policy the best protection, maybe the only protection, available to 'ordinary' people?”

Response

“Although an insurance policy may be of use for compensating victims for any loss to or damage to property it will not protect someone from becoming a victim of crime, and could in no way negate the personal impact on a victim of crime. There is some crime prevention advice relating to business safety on the PSNI website or advice is available from Crime Prevention Officers.”

7. Conclusion

- i. The Chair thanked everyone present for attending and summarised that the meeting had been very worthwhile and constructive.