

**Minutes of South Belfast District Policing and Community
Safety Partnership – Policing Committee
Monday, 3rd June 2013, 1.00pm
Lavery Room, City Hall**

Political Members

Cllr. Deirdre Hargey (Chair)
Ald. Tom Ekin

Independent Members

Mr. Trevor Greer
Ms. Debbie Hammill
Ms. Nuala Toman

Police Service of Northern Ireland

Chief Inspector Gabriel Moran

Staff Present

Denise Smith, CS Coordinator
Jo Black, Partnership Support
Officer

Apology

Councillor Kate Mullan

1. Welcome & Routine Matters

- i. The Chair, Councillor Deirdre Hargey, welcomed the Members to the Policing Committee of the South Belfast DPCSP.

2. Declarations of Interest

- i. The Chair highlighted the declaration of interest policy. There were no declarations of interest.

3. South Belfast DPCSP Policing Committee Minutes (minutes to follow)

- i. Nuala Toman proposed the minutes of the 30th April 2013 Policing Committee meeting. Councillor Deirdre Hargey seconded the minutes.

4. Area Commanders Update on Policing in south Belfast (oral report from representatives of the Police Service of Northern Ireland)

- i. The Area Commander highlighted the year end figures for April 12 - March 2013.
- ii. There were significant reductions in levels of Violent Crime. There was a 7% reduction in violence to the person, and an 8.3% reduction in violence with injury. Sexual crime for the year was up by 4 offences or 2.5%. For most serious sexual offences there was a fall of six offences or 4.7% with a 28% clearance rate which was low, however this is impacted by complexity of investigations and time taken for decisions on files forwarded to the Public Prosecutions Service.
- iii. Looking at the current year the Area Commander highlighted the following provisional figures for April and May 2013. In April 2013 alone there had been an increase of about 60 residential burglaries compared to April and May 2012, however April 2012 had seen the lowest level of reported burglaries in 5 years. There was an increase in business burglary however this is believed to be linked to one individual. There were also high levels of

shoplifting and thefts of wallets and handbags in clubs, however the ID scanning scheme might lead to reduced incidents as in Great Britain. In recent weeks there had been an increase in reports of burglary. New mapping software was available to PSNI officers which could input locations of burglaries and prevent further incidents.

- iv. Operation TORUS had contributed significantly to a 26.5% increase in the number of drugs offences recorded in the full year April 12-March 2013. This was resulting from resources being allocated at a central and district level. There was a sanctioned clearance rate of 79.9% for these offences. However there was some consideration being made as to whether discretionary disposals would be counted towards outcomes, which might lead to these in future being included in the outcomes figure data.

5. Oral questions from Members

- i. A Member enquired if the incidents of burglaries which were taking place in businesses were in the same areas. The Member further asked if the previous carjacking incidents in the city centre in the same quarter of 2012 were continuing to occur.
- ii. The Area Commander reported there had been a car jacking reported 7-10 days ago and resources had been rechanneled to address this type of crime.
- iii. A Member asked about the recent attacks in Botanic Garden.
- iv. The Safer City Coordinator, Denise Smith, explained that there were increased patrols by the Parks service and also Neighbourhood officers working in the area.
- v. The Area Commander explained that there had been a focus of PSNI attention on the night time economy for associated violent crime and sexual offences.
- vi. A Member asked if there was a report on Hate Crime available.
- vii. The Area Commander explained that there had been a reduction in racist, homophobic and transphobic incidents. The number of these incidents seemed to be reducing due to support and crime prevention work which had been carried out.
- viii. A Member asked a question regarding the topic of social networking problems being experienced in the Holylands area of the city, such as the 'rate your shag' facebook page and also a group called the 'Holylands Lads'. The Member expressed concern regarding attacks on women travelling home and also the effect on men commenting on social networking sites.

Reporting of this to the police must be on the basis of an actual offence while posting in itself may not be a crime. If the posting refers to an actual incident this would be a line of enquiry to identify suspects however it should also be emphasised that there are large sections of the internet

where postings are made which would be better described as crude creative writings. Social Media is an ongoing and developing area for policing and can be an area of crime or also of what is called Citizen Journalism. The Area Commander highlighted the Facebook page which had posted a video of a woman parallel parking in the Holylands as an example of where privacy could be invaded. This however was in a public area and would not be an offence – a person concerned however can apply to the internet provider to have items removed if false or if it infringes their privacy. If this is refused they may have to take Civil Action. Members could consider raising the awareness of dangers of these kinds of postings.

- ix. A Member suggested that Members should proceed to undertake an awareness campaign via lobbying to change policies on posting or campaigning against this kind of publicity via the DPCSP facebook page.
- x. A Member highlighted incidents in the High Street area where young people in gangs were targeting older people. They were also skimming cards in bank machines in the area.
- xi. The Area Commander explained he was aware of the groups skimming cards and that they were geographically moving around. Crime prevention messages have been circulated regarding skimming. Regarding pick pocketing of older people he indicated that this was an issue that emerged from time to time and that it often involved travelling professional pickpockets who move also around not just Northern Ireland but also the rest of Ireland and wider into GB and beyond. He described an incident some years back at Christmas time involving a gang of pick pockets who were travelling up from Dublin. He confirmed that where there was a particular pattern emerging PSNI would act on it.

6. Written question

- i. There was a written question which was presented to the Area Commander for response. Over the past two years a crime wave has happened in the Donegall Road/Village area of South Belfast, including sectarian and racist attacks on people and property, a tazer gun attack on a youth and threatening of his friends, a baseball bat attack on a local man, death threats to members of the local community, numerous amounts of pipe bomb finds and attacks and hoax bombs and the stoking up of interface tensions (flags at Broadway Roundabout). These things are being carried out by a small group of people within the area, my question is, how has this been going on so long without any major arrests by the PSNI.
- ii. The Area Commander explained that the Office of the First and Deputy First Minister were engaging on the issue of flags under the Cohesion and Integration Strategy. This work remains ongoing. Where there had been suspect and hoax devices found, the evidence secured by intelligence was being used. Pipe bombs were subject to investigation by terrorism investigation unit. Where there were terrorist incidents or incidents of racism, forensics was useful and officers would seek to preserve these if dealing with a reported incident. Officers would also seek to secure evidence through taking statements, encouraging members of the public

unwilling to provide statements to provide intelligence through either speaking to neighbourhood police or via crimestoppers. Police would continue to ask that DPCSP members and the wider leadership in the community should support and encourage those in the community who know what happened to give information. These pieces of evidence were helpful to support investigations and hopefully lead to prosecutions.

- iii. A Member asked a further question to enquire if there were any arrests connected to the incidents.
- iv. The Area Commander responded there had been one arrest in relation to the incident involving tazers. He stressed the importance of evidence to securing prosecutions and that statements from witnesses are key elements of this. In the case of racist attacks, PSNI had invested in CCTV cameras. Victims of hate crime could be offered access to these cameras where they were victims of repeat incidents. The Area Commander explained that reports should be made to the Department of Regional Development Roads Service regarding painting kerbstones. These have at times been reported as criminal damage; however members of the public did not tend to report these incidents and the victim who must report and support a prosecution is the Roads Service.

7. G8 Update

- i. The Area Commander gave an update which on the G8 summit on 17th and 18th June. A briefing on the G8 was being delivered to Council.

8. Emerging Issues

- i. A Member enquired about the trouble at the Broadway roundabout and Finaghy cross roads.
Members to monitor issues at Broadway and Finaghy.
- ii. A member enquired about the upcoming difficulties around Fresher's week.
Members are to be kept updated on Fresher's preparations.
- iii. The Area Commander explained that South Belfast stations would link in with regional campaigns in relation to hate crime. He explained that historically there had been a high incidence of hate incidents and hate crime within South Belfast.

9. Date of Next Meeting

- i. The next Policing Committee Meeting is on Wednesday 28th August at 17.00hrs in the HR Conference Room, Cecil Ward Building.