

**Minutes of the West Belfast District Policing and Community Safety Partnership
Special Policing Committee Meeting**

**Conor Room, City Hall
Friday, 17th January, 2014**

Political Members

Councillor Marie Hendron (Chair)
Councillor Tim Attwood
Councillor Steven Corr
Councillor Matt Garrett

Independent Members

Harry Connolly (Vice-Chair)
Breige Brownlee
Bernie Reilly
Ann-Marie Weir

PSNI Representatives

Inspector Mike White
Sergeant Gerry McKenna
Sergeant Christopher Robinson

Staff Present

Alistair Charles, Safer City Co-ordinator
Michael Burns, Project Officer
Katharine McCrum, Partnership Support
Officer

Apology

Councillor Billy Hutchinson

1. Welcome and Routine Matters

- i. The Vice-Chair welcomed Members to the meeting and noted the apology provided. He thanked Members for attending the meeting at short notice and underlined the Policing Committee's legislative role in providing the PSNI with feedback regarding service delivery.

2. Discussion around Specific Incidents in West Belfast

- i. The Vice-Chair asked PSNI representatives to comment on various incidents which had recently taken place in West Belfast and invited the other Members to raise additional issues. These included;
 - New Year's Eve death driving on the Falls Road, in particular the perceived low level of response by PSNI landrovers,
 - Officers response to a burglary in Whitecliff Parade when threats to kill had allegedly not been taken seriously by Officers,
 - Frustrations with police response times and instances of Officers hanging up on callers,
 - The use of social media in organising criminal behaviour and the perceived lack of intelligence gathering from these sources,
 - Community perception that police resources are more available to other areas of the City,
 - Concerns regarding prolific offenders who were released for Christmas, both in terms of the impact on crime, and the apparent lack of awareness by some Officers of impending releases,

- PSNI Officers absence at community meetings to which they had been invited,
 - Community perception that additional resources from the Lower Falls/Divis areas which were in place as the result of Operation Echinus had now been diverted to other areas of the City such as North Belfast (Twadell Avenue),
 - The impact that this issues is having on levels of community confidence in the PSNI.
- ii. Inspector White assured Members that the PSNI were willing to listen to community and Member's concerns and were committed to continued partnership working. He added that he sympathised with the issues raised and agreed that the examples of poor attitude from Officers was not acceptable and that he would encourage and support any complaints that the public wished to make, whether formal or informal. He stated that conversations regularly took place with Response and Neighbourhood Officers regarding their interaction with victims and the impact that crime has on them, whether serious or minor in police terms.

New Year's Eve Death Driving

- iii. With regards to incidents which took place on New Year's Eve, Inspector White stated that he had been disappointed with events given that 4 additional crews had been in operation however it had been a busy time due to domestic and alcohol related calls. He added that the perception that Officers left the scene had been inaccurate and that police vehicles withdrew following damage sustained after being 'rammed' to be replaced by other vehicles. He stated that a Tactical Support Group was brought in as a result of crowds numbering over 200 making foot patrols impractical. He conceded that police CCTV had been lacking.
- iv. Members were advised that from a proactive point of view, the Auto Crime Unit were working with additional resources, media appeals were ongoing and that local CCTV was being reviewed.
- v. With regards to social media, Inspector White advised Members that public pages were reviewed however if a page was closed or private, the PSNI was unable to monitor it.

Resources and Bail Checks

- vi. In response to queries regarding bail checks, Members were advised that checks were being carried. Inspector White confirmed that the police did not have a say in Christmas parole as this was a decision made by the Courts.
- vii. Inspector White advised Members that additional Officers were still in place following Operation Echinus, but accepted that the incidents under discussion did not reflect this. He confirmed that activity at Twadell Avenue was resource intensive, however this was not affecting Officer numbers in the Lower Falls/Divis areas.
- viii. In conclusion, Inspector White stated that he was disappointed to hear that Officers had not attended the community meetings mentioned, adding that he was unaware of the incidents in question. He invited the Member who had raised the matter to discuss with him privately in order to resolve the issue and re-establish confidence in the community.

Community Confidence

- ix. A Member advised that the incidents described had undermined the credibility of Elected Members and community representatives who had been working to promote direct reporting to the police and build community confidence in the PSNI.
- x. Inspector White stated that he would speak to Officers again regarding their conduct and reminded Members that as well as internal disciplinary measures, the Police Ombudsman could also be availed of. He added that while direct reporting would be preferable, he welcomed all reporting of crime. He added that Officers had been told to explain resourcing issues if an immediate response was not possible, and to then follow this up with a phone call at a later time.
- xi. Members discussed the meetings which had already taken place regarding the death driving which took place on New Year's Eve with several Members feeling that the DPCSP should be invited to take a lead role in such discussions. The Vice-Chair clarified that DPCSP staff had been invited to attend and this had now been extended to Members.
- xii. Members also discussed the spate of carjacking that took place in South Belfast during 2012 and the resources that had been allocated as a result. It was felt by some that the level of response to those incidents represented an inconsistent approach across the City.

Actions

- xiii. A Member suggested that time should be taken to bring together members of the community and the police in order for their concerns to be heard and the impact of such events to be fully understood. He also suggested that the DPCSP meet with representatives from Families Bereaved Through Car Crime, to investigate the possibility of doing some promotion work around the potential impacts of death driving.
- xiv. Members also discussed the impact of Facebook and the Andersonstown News in disseminating information and suggested that the police utilise these in order to promote examples of proactive activities such as arrests, bail checks and alcohol prosecutions. It was also suggested that key telephone numbers such as the noise hotline should be provided in a regular update section.
- xv. Inspector White agreed that a weekly article had worked well in the past however often information that was provided did not appear in the paper and asked if those present could perhaps provide influence locally.
- xvi. Members were also advised that issues such as CCTV and street lighting were being discussed with other agencies.
- xvii. The Vice-Chair thanked the police for attending to listen to these concerns and asked that the actions discussed were taken forward and reported against at future meetings in the form of a standing agenda item.
- xviii. A Member also asked that a briefing on the PSNI Service First be provided at the next DPCSP meeting, particularly on the impact that moving all West Belfast Neighbourhood Teams to Woodburn would have on response times.