

Minutes of Safer Neighbourhoods and Active Communities Scrutiny Board

**Thursday 14 March 2024 at 6pm
In the Council Chamber - Sandwell Council House, Oldbury**

Present: Councillor Fenton (Chair);
Councillors Davies, Lewis and Shaeen.

Also Present: Chief Superintendent Kim Maddil (West Midlands Police) and Andrew Shakespeare (Operations Commander for Black Country South – West Midlands Fire Service).

Officers: Tessa Mitchell (Business Manager – Community Safety and Resilience), Wendy Simms (Modern Slavery, Human Trafficking and Exploitation Programme Manager), Manny Sehmbi (Business Manager – Community Partnerships), Stuart Hall (Home Improvement Manager), Alexander Goddard (Scrutiny Lead Officer) and John Swann (Democratic Services Officer).

23/24 **Apologies for Absence**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors K Allcock, Dhatt, Fisher, Khan, Maycock, Webb and Younis.

24/24 **Declarations of Interest**

There were no declarations of interest.

25/24 **Minutes**

Resolved that the minutes of the meetings held on 15 February 2024 are confirmed as a correct record.

26/24 **Additional Items of Business**

There were no urgent additional items of business to consider.

27/24 **Implementation of Sandwell Community Safety Strategy 2022- 26**

Further to Minute No. 30/23 (Meeting held on 23 March 2023) the Board received an update of the work undertaken by the Safer Sandwell Partnership Police and Crime Board. The Board was a multi- agency body made up of colleagues from West Midlands Police, West Midlands Fire Service, the local authority, and probation and health colleagues.

The key priorities within the strategy were:-

- The prevention of violence and exploitation;
- Reducing offending, reoffending and serious organised crime;
- Preventing crime and antisocial behaviour.

The strategy was driven via three sub-groups who oversaw annual work plans which were renewed throughout the year and updated annually.

Knife crime, anti-social behaviour and youth violence involving under 25s were the top three concerns of residents. Sandwell was currently the third safest local authority area in the West Midlands, with work being underway to become the second safest regionally.

The prevention of violence and exploitation

Domestic Abuse and Modern Slavery strategies had been rolled out to strengthen victim pathways and supports, with further work underway to embed a trauma informed approach.

Safeguarding exercises had also taken place in out-of-school settings with young people and the Safer 6 campaign had also amplified public awareness of community safety issues. It was reported that knife crime involving victims aged between 10 and 17 had decreased by 14.8%

Data exercises had informed understanding of what the root causes of violence were – including unemployment and poverty.

In addition, a comprehensive modern slavery training programme had been launched to educate and raise awareness of exploitation and abuse.

Reducing offending, reoffending and serious organised crime

Approximately 80% of individuals who receive cautions or convictions have offended before, however Sandwell had experienced a 9.2% decrease in youth reoffending rates.

The focus was on implementing offender management programmes and expanding access to education and employment to reintegrate them into society following release from prison.

Serious organised crime groups which operated in Sandwell were linked to drug use and firearms – there had been three recent charges for firearms offences and more than 100 arrests over the past year. As part of the mapping of serious organised crime it was acknowledged that young people with increased vulnerabilities were more likely to engage in criminality.

A new electronic monitoring scheme for offenders had been successfully launched in Sandwell, it incorporated alcohol monitoring on licence and GPS tags for domestic abuse perpetrators. The Board was advised that due to the pressures of prison capacity, the expansion of the use of electric monitoring was likely to increase.

Preventing crime and anti- social behaviour (ASB)

Over the past year, there had been an increase of 29.7% in ASB incidents reported to West Midlands Police, with all towns experiencing an increase except Rowley Regis.

72 Town Tasking meetings had been held across the Borough. In addition, over 11,000 pupils had attended hate crime Awareness sessions during national hate crime week.

A Safe Spaces Scheme had been introduced on Bearwood High Street in collaboration with local businesses and CCTV had been installed in the locality.

Furthermore, £500,000 of Levelling Up funding had been allocated to tackle ASB in Wednesbury Town Centre – including CCTV and nuisance bike inhibitors.

From the comments and questions by members of the Board, the following responses were made, and issues highlighted:-

- There were concerns related to young people carrying weapons. The hospital navigators programme – for victims of knife crime has been successful, however there were concerns that a confrontation could very quickly become a major incident.
- Evidence showed that perception of knife crime increased knife crime prevalence – as those who were fearful of being stabbed were more likely to carry a knife for protection. It was acknowledged that all parties had a role to play in combating misinformation.
- Key messaging to concerned parents was simple – and included ‘check the kitchen drawer’ related messaging.
- An ‘aide-mémoire’ (cheat-sheet) for parents concerned about their child’s involvement in anti- social behaviour and low- level crime could benefit those in the community.
- Sandwell Council of Voluntary Organisations (SCVO) had a Directory of Services on their website which can signpost individual worried about crime to support services.
- Types of crime had changed during the pandemic – notably domestic abuse, modern slavery and child sexual exploitation had increased.
- Cuckooing had greatly increased, with those who were vulnerable at greatest risk.
- Concerns existed in relation to skilled care working paying to be brought into the UK under false pretences – who are then effectively ‘trapped’ working for their employer.
- The court backlog was acknowledged – concerns in relation to the police being unable to remand into custody whilst awaiting trial were present.

- The prevent team was part of community tasking – it was acknowledged that people who had experienced hate crime were at greater risk of radicalisation.
- There were no properties with unsafe cladding that posed a fire risk in the Borough.
- Changing personnel within neighbourhood policing teams could cause instability, a robust handover process could improve this.
- Community safety of high rise estates was a priority – Phase 3 expansion to bring CCTV and concierge services to all of the Council’s high rise buildings was currently being tendered. Upon conclusion of the tender process an update would be provided to the board.
- West Midlands Police had a Survivor Liaison Officer who worked with victims of domestic violence in collaboration with Black Country Women’s Aid.
- It was understood that tackling nuisance off road bikers were challenging, nuisance bike inhibitors had been installed across the Borough and partners were working with retailers who sold these bikes to identify offenders. Community Protection Notices (CPNs) could be used as an enforcement tool, however lack of number plates meant enforcement was more challenging.
- West Midlands Fire Services had purchased new four by four vehicles which could access parks and green spaces. These would help address the fire risk posed by barbecue use in hot weather.

Resolved:-

- (1) that the Sandwell Council of Voluntary Organisation’s (SCVO) Directory of Services (which support those impacted by violence) is:-
 - (a) cascaded to all Elected Members;
 - (b) featured prominently on SCVO’s website;
- (2) that a robust handover process is established for when staffing personnel change in neighbourhood policing and ward officer teams to foster good dialogue and relationship between elected members and local policing teams;

- (3) that a briefing session is delivered to Board Members on pandemic and post-pandemic crime trends (Domestic abuse, modern day slavery and child sexual exploitation);
- (4) that a 'aide-mémoire' (cheat- sheet) for parents concerned about child involvement in anti-social behaviour and low-level crime be prepared and cascaded to the community;
- (5) that, upon conclusion of the tender process, a clear timeline for the installation of CCTV (Phase 3) in the remaining 27 High Rise tower blocks be provided to the Board.

28/24

Private Sector Housing Assistance Policy and Policy on Adaptations for Disabled Tenants in Council Housing

The Board considered an update report on the Private Sector Housing Assistance Policy and Policy on Adaptations for Disabled Tenants in Council Housing that had originally been considered by the Board at its meeting on 23 March 2023 (see Minute No. 33/23).

Members received an overview of the activity that had taken place since the revised policies were approved. This included a refreshed Adaptations Panel, refined and streamlined pathways and the development of a new appeals process. In addition, programmes were being developed which were targeting vulnerable households, to support residents' health and wellbeing, improve quality of life and helping residents to remain in their homes safely.

It was reported that funding for adaptations was through two streams; one a Government grant and the other from the Housing Revenue Account (HRA). There was currently a £12.4m reserve, which had developed through the impact of Covid which had created delays in works, but also through developing policy to look at better ways to use resources to support people with disabilities in their homes.

From the comments and questions by members of the Board, the following responses were made, and issues highlighted:-

- There was an aim to deliver more adaptations which would utilise some of the reserve, but it was prudent to ensure an appropriate level of reserves was retained while increasing the numbers of adaptations.
- The first £15k of anyone's contributions were disregarded; this meant that since June 2023 approximately 40 applications had been supported that otherwise would have been means tested out.
- The WMCA had a Home Upgrade Grant targeted at properties without mains gas supply. If possible, Sandwell would like to widen this to include households without controllable central heating or insulation, or still with a back boiler.
- There were lots of funding sources available, so it was important to use Council funds to complement what was already available through other sources. This would maximise the impact of Council funds.
- Adult Social Care would re-assess households where circumstances changed or needs became different over time.
- Service and maintenance of lifts (including stair lifts, external step lifts, hoists and vertical lifts) was for the lifetime of the lift. If a lift became obsolete (e.g. parts no longer being available for older models), then it would be replaced. A register of these adaptations was kept and shared with the Council's lift servicing contractor.
- Not all residents who may need adaptations would engage with Occupational Health or Adult Social Care but would instead be receiving services from their GP or physiotherapist.

Resolved:-

- (1) that a further report on the allocation of reserves of the Adaptations budget be brought to a future meeting of the Safer Neighbourhoods and Active Communities Scrutiny Board;
- (2) that the Health and Adult Social Care Scrutiny Board be requested to consider how Adult Social Care had contact with local GPs and therapy services and how they are informed about when people may require Adaptation services.

29/24 **Safer Neighbourhoods and Active Communities Scrutiny Action Tracker**

The Board noted the status of actions and recommendations it had made.

30/24 **Cabinet Forward Plan and Work Programme**

The Board noted its Work Programme for 2023-24 and received the Cabinet Forward Plan.

31/24 **Vote of Thanks**

The Board placed on record its thanks to the Chair and Vice-Chair for the way in which they had conducted the business of the Board.

Members also placed on record their thanks to officers for their work in supporting the Board.

Meeting ended at 8.42pm

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