

SCRUTINY PANEL B

Virtual Meeting held on Thursday, 23rd July, 2020 at 7.00 pm

Present: Councillor Christian Chapman in the Chair;

Councillors Ciaran Brown, Dale Grounds,
Trevor Locke and David Walters.

Apologies for Absence: Councillors Melanie Darrington and
Phil Rostance.

Officers Present: Lynn Cain, Daniel Griffin, Jack Harrison,
Mike Joy, Antonio Taylor, Rebecca Whitehead
and Shane Wright.

In Attendance: Councillors Helen-Ann Smith and
Jason Zadrozny.

SB.1 Declarations of Disclosable Pecuniary or Personal Interests and Non Disclosable Pecuniary/Other Interests

No declarations of interest were made.

SB.2 Minutes

RESOLVED

that the minutes of the meeting of the Panel held on 10 March 2020, be
received and approved as a correct record.

SB.3 Scrutiny Review: Community Protection Service

The Service Manager, Scrutiny and Democratic Services introduced the item to the Panel and welcomed everyone present to the meeting. Unfortunately, the invitations extended to the Chief Inspector, Mark Dixon and Neighbourhood Policing Sergeant Kate Long, had been declined due to conflicting work requirements but both had expressed their desire to attend a future meeting and take part in the Community Protection Service review.

Members reacquainted themselves with the previous work undertaken by the Panel to set the framework in place to facilitate the review. Presentations had previously been given by the Service Manager, Community Safety alongside the Anti-Social Behaviour and Triage Team Manager to enable Members to gain an insight into the current role of the Community Protection Officer (CPO) and preliminary discussions had set parameters to achieve the desired outcomes to the review.

Community Protection Officer Role

To assist the Panel further, the Service Manager, Community Safety reiterated the responsibilities of the CPO's and explained the many strands to the role which required both a reactive and proactive approach. A schedule was shared on screen to enable the Panel to get a sense of the diverse range of requests that CPO's were tasked with including:

- foot patrols;
- dealing with incidences of anti-social behaviour;
- assisting homeless people;
- untaxed vehicles;
- fly tipping and evidence searching;
- delivering food packages;
- neighbour disputes;
- children playing in unsafe buildings;
- dispersing groups on parks and open spaces;
- litter picks with former offenders.

The Panel's Vision for the CPO Role

The overarching requirement of the review was to establish clear service objectives for the CPO role that were fit for purpose and mirrored the vision of both the Council and its Members for a robust, effective community safety service for the District.

Members were asked to consider what they believed to be the right mix of responsibilities for the CPO role, taking on board both the more reactive enforcement side of their duties and the more proactive approach undertaken as part of their connection and promotion of well-being within communities.

Working in Partnership

Following a question, the Panel considered the current collaborative working arrangements with the Police and how information was shared effectively between the two services. Daniel Griffin and Jack Harrison, the two CPO's in attendance at the meeting, spoke positively about the working arrangements and the willingness on both sides to work together to achieve outcomes.

The airwaves radio system, shared by the Police and CPO's, was an excellent communication tool and allowed for requests for back up, assistance and information as required. The Council were also working with the Police to enable the CPOs to have access to their 'safe system' which would enable a greater level of information sharing to support their work further.

The Anti-Social Behaviour and Triage Team Manager also attended both joint tasking meetings and Police briefings as required.

Community Protection Officer Powers

Members acknowledged some of the powers currently vested in the CPO's, as follows:

- Require the name and address of a person who has committed a criminal offence or acting in an anti-social manner;

- Confiscate alcohol, cigarettes and tobacco from young people;
- Require the removal of abandoned vehicles;
- Require a person to stop drinking in a designated public place and leave;
- Issue fixed penalty notices for dog fouling, littering, graffiti and fly posting;
- Issue a penalty notice for disorder for:
 - The sale of alcohol to a person under 18
 - Buying or attempting to buy alcohol by a person under 18
 - Consumption of alcohol by a person under 18
 - Wasting police time or giving a false report
 - Behaviour likely to cause harassment, alarm or distress;
- Housing enforcement action against Council tenants;
- Statutory nuisance powers for bonfire and noise nuisances etc.

Triage Service and Out of Hours Response

In answer to a Member question, the Panel were advised that the Council's Community Safety triage service was only operational during working hours. The service was designed to enable designated staff to assess cases as they came in and referring them to the most appropriate place i.e. Community Protection Team, Anti-Social Behaviour Caseworkers or the Complex Case Team.

After 5.00pm, any calls/emails are diverted to the CCTV control room and are picked up by the 'out of hours' officers. The airwave radios are still operational at these times including a duty phone that ensures contact can be made at all times to assess cases and target resources accordingly.

Additional Powers due to COVID-19 outbreak

Members were advised that no new powers had been granted thus far to the Community Safety service as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Case Recording by Officers

A spreadsheet template was shared on screen which gave an example of the types of data capture required by the CPOs as they undertook their daily duties. The recording template had been created by the Community Safety Team and the CPO's in attendance confirmed that populating the spread sheet was working well and did not inflict too much pressure on their time.

Some of the data captured in the spreadsheet included:

- Date and time of incident/case;
- What powers were used to address the issue;
- Location;
- If welfare visits had been undertaken;
- Surveys carried out;
- Referrals to Police/Other Agencies;
- FPN's issued.

Notwithstanding the use of the spreadsheet, the main recording software for cases/incidents was via the multi-partnership E-Cins system. Members were advised that the system was very positive if populated regularly by all partners, but data extraction and the formulation of accurate reporting documents was proving to be difficult and at times, somewhat unreliable.

Members commented that the data spreadsheets must prove useful for revealing hotspot areas within the District and whilst the Service Manager, Community Safety concurred with the comments, she reiterated that the CPO's knowledge of the District and problems being experienced within certain areas and with certain individuals was second to none. This continually proved invaluable in the Council's efforts to address escalating problems as they arose.

Rehabilitation of Offenders

The CPO officers also spent time trying to rehabilitate young ASB offenders and the Deputy Leader and Portfolio Holder for Community Safety explained that a litter pick was often far more effective at curbing bad behaviour than a monetary fine. Giving a sense of responsibility to the offender often proved more effective and Members acknowledged that additional welfare concerns associated with the offender usually became apparent once checks on their background were initiated.

Leader of the Council

The Leader of the Council took the opportunity to address the Panel and raised concerns that appropriate enforcement and issuing of FPNs to offenders did not seem to be happening. With particular reference to dog fouling, he felt disappointed that the streets and parks were still battling with problem but the issuing of FPN's by CPO's still remained worryingly low.

Having mooted that the introduction of targets for FPN issue might assist with the problem, the Service Manager, Community Safety reiterated that the CPOs had been working extremely hard through the COVID-19 pandemic and that the service had been stretched with the vast range of activities and conflicting priorities.

Following the comments a brief discussion took place and Members were in disagreement that monetary targets alone would provide an adequate solution to environmental issues such as littering and dog fouling. However, they did concede following a comment from the Service Manager, Community Safety that a more proactive response from the CPOs and the PCSOs to challenge dog walkers to provide evidence of receptacles for collecting dog waste would be a step in the right direction.

Next Steps

Following the discussion, Members made suggestions for data capture to inform the review and agreed that a preliminary survey of Members would be useful to ascertain their ideas/visions/priorities for an effective CPO service going forward.

The Service Manager, Scrutiny and Democratic Services suggested that in the time available prior to the next Panel meeting on 17 September 2020, informal working groups could be arranged to ensure Members had an opportunity to meet with associated stakeholders and ascertain their perceptions/views in respect of the service. Members might also wish to further consider the best mechanisms for effectively monitoring and managing the service.

RESOLVED

that the Service Manager, Scrutiny and Democratic Services be requested to undertake the following in readiness for the next Panel meeting on 17 September 2020:

- a) undertake a survey of all Ashfield Members to ascertain their ideas, visions and priorities for the delivery of an effective CPO service;
- b) arrange sufficient informal group meetings to offer an opportunity for the Panel and appropriate officers:
 - to meet with associated stakeholders and ascertain their perceptions/views in respect of the Community Protection service including:

Police Chief Inspector, Mark Dixon;
Neighbourhood Police Sergeant, Kate Long;
Leader of the Council;
Deputy Leader and Portfolio Holder for Community Safety;
Community representatives;
 - to consider the best mechanisms and technology for effectively monitoring and managing the Community Protection service and its employees in the future.

The meeting closed at 8.20 pm

Chairman.