

Community Safety, Highways and Environment Scrutiny Board

19 August, 2015

Summary of Matters Considered at the Board

Report of the Chair, Councillor L Horton

The Scrutiny Board met on 19 August, 2015 and the following items were considered. I have selected the main points of the discussion which I feel members of the Council will be particularly interested to know more about. For more detail, a copy of the minutes is available on the Committee Management Information System (CMIS) via the Council's website at <http://cmis.sandwell.gov.uk/cmis5/>

1. West Midlands Police 2020 Change Programme

The Board received a presentation and report from the Chief Superintendent of West Midlands Police in relation to its 2020 Change Programme.

Members noted that in order to deliver the programme the West Midlands Police and Crime Commissioner had entered into a strategic partnership between West Midlands Police and Accenture (UK) Limited. The partnership, and the associated change programme, is known as 'WMP2020'.

The aim of WMP2020 is to ensure that West Midlands Police can continue to deliver high quality policing services, whilst meeting a further period of austerity. This is despite having already undergone substantial organisational change in 2010, which saw the Police reduce from 21 largely autonomous operational command units to 10 local policing units (including Sandwell local policing unit), focused on locality working and supported by a range of more centralised specialised policing services.

The Board noted that the Council and the Police, along with other key stakeholders, have worked hard not only to reduce crime but to reduce the perception of crime, and that following a decade of neighbourhood policing, residents have come to value the role of the Police Community Support Officer.

Members highlighted the risks associated with cutting neighbourhood policing, and the potential loss to 'grassroots' intelligence. The Board was advised that, whilst there will be cuts to neighbourhood policing, there will still be some resource allocated, and that as a result engagement activity will need to be prioritised to deliver the greatest outcomes.

The Board will consider a further update on progression with the Change Programme at its scheduled meeting in December 2015.

2. Safer Sandwell Partnership Police and Crime Board Strategic Assessment and Priorities for 2015/16

The Board noted that the Safer Sandwell Partnership's 2015/16 strategic assessment is based around four problem profiles that the Partnership agreed and commissioned earlier in the year – Domestic Violence, Cybercrime, Gangs and Victims. The four profiles are still being completed and were presented to the Safer Sandwell Partnership Police and Crime Board, and to each of the partnerships sub groups in September 2015. The identified priorities are aimed at:-

- i) reducing crime and anti-social behavior;
- ii) supporting the most vulnerable victims;
- iii) preventing and reducing re-offending;
- iv) preventing and reducing domestic abuse and supporting victims;
- v) reducing the harm caused by drug and alcohol misuse;
- vi) preventing extremism and promoting community cohesion.

Members noted that the Partnership funds a full time analyst to undertake research and that the recommendation to the Partnership would be for the priorities put forward to remain in place for 2015/16 and for 2016/17, as it is felt that a longer delivery time will allow for the achievement of further positive outcomes in these areas.

The Board feels that the priorities reflect the changing nature of crime both in Sandwell and in relation to the national picture.

The Board will participate in the development and progression of a Preventing Violent Extremism Strategy for Sandwell, work on which will commence following a regional event to be held in autumn 2015 that will assist in informing and shaping the strategy document.

3. Cabinet Member with Responsibility for Town and Neighbourhood Services

In accordance with the primary duty of Scrutiny to hold the Executive to account, the Cabinet Member with responsibility for the Town and Neighbourhood Services Portfolio was invited to attend the meeting to discuss his portfolio area.

The Board noted that, as the member with responsibility for crime and disorder, the cabinet member sits on the Safer Sandwell Partnership Police and Crime Board. The Board considered the forthcoming decisions due to be taken by the Cabinet in the portfolio area of Town and Neighbourhood Services.

In response to questions from members of the Board the following responses were provided and issues highlighted:-

- i) the level of cuts that have to be delivered by West Midlands Police mean that it is not an option for them to protect all front line services and, unfortunately, some visible changes will have to be made;
- ii) the Council is proud of its partnership with West Midlands Police, and as a result both the levels of crime and perception of crime have reduced;
- iii) the impact of the Police re-structure, whilst somewhat unknown in terms of specific staffing, will affect the neighbourhood working arrangements adopted by the Council.

4. Care Leavers

The Chair advised that the chairs of all scrutiny boards regularly meet as a collective to maintain oversight of all scrutiny board work programmes, and ensure that the overall direction of the scrutiny function is positive and delivering results, in accordance with the Council's scorecard priorities.

In light of the outcome of the Council's recent Ofsted inspection, the scrutiny board chairs have decided to carry out a piece of work to look at how scrutiny can demonstrate its commitment and support to Children's Services' improvement journey.

Each board has therefore been asked to contribute to this work by focussing on an area within its terms of reference.

The Board was asked to look at crime rates and links to violent extremism in relation to looked after children and received a presentation on this subject.

The Group Head for Young People's Services and Youth Justice advised that offending behaviour in Sandwell has reduced year on year since 2008/9, to 2013/14, evidencing a 78% reduction in first time entrants into the criminal justice system over that period. In 2014/15 Sandwell recorded a slight increase in first time entrants of 17% or 22 young people.

The evidence suggests that there is not a significant issue in Sandwell concerning looked after children and vulnerability to radicalisation as a result of their care status. Of the 71 looked after children known to the youth offending team, or referred to targeted youth support, only six young people were referred due to what can be perceived to be extremist views.

Engaging young people who express radical or extremist views is a voluntary, non-statutory intervention and therefore is not enforceable unless a specific crime is committed. In the main, young people do engage voluntarily, and subsequently benefit from the support offered and the ability to explore their views and perceptions in a safe environment.

The Board noted that nationally nearly a quarter of the adult prison population is made up of individuals who have been in care. In 2012, the Ministry for Justice published research into the childhood and family background of prisoners and found that twenty-four per cent of prisoners stated that they had been in care at some point during their childhood. Those who had been in care were generally younger when they were first arrested, and are more likely to be reconvicted in the year after release from custody than those who have never been in care.

Councillor L Horton
Chair