

Customers and Communities Overview and Scrutiny Panel

Monday 12 March 2012

PRESENT:

Councillor Thompson, in the Chair.

Councillor Peter Smith, Vice Chair.

Councillors Mrs Aspinall (Substitute for Councillor Davey), Browne, Martin Leaves, Penberthy, John Smith and Vincent.

Co-opted Representative: Dr A Jellings.

Apologies for absence: Councillors Mrs Beer, Churchill and Davey.

Also in attendance: Peter Aley (Head of Safer Communities), Carole Burgoyne (Director for People), DCI James Colwill (Devon and Cornwall Police), David Green (Everyone Active), Jo Hambly (Financial and Social Inclusion Officer), Sarah Hopkins (Community Safety Partnership Manager), Tony Hopwood (Programme Director), Councillor Jordan (Cabinet Member for Community Services (Safer and Stronger Communities and Leisure, Culture and Sport)), Nick McMahon (Localities Officer) and Helen Wright (Democratic Support Officer).

The meeting started at 4pm and finished at 6.30pm.

Note: At a future meeting, the committee will consider the accuracy of these draft minutes, so they may be subject to change. Please check the minutes of that meeting to confirm whether these minutes have been amended.

70. **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

There were no declarations of interest made by councillors in accordance with the code of conduct.

71. **CHAIR'S URGENT BUSINESS**

There were no items of Chair's urgent business.

72. **TRACKING RESOLUTIONS AND FEEDBACK FROM THE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY MANAGEMENT BOARD**

The Chair reported on issues raised at the Overview and Scrutiny Management Board meeting held on 29 February 2012, which included –

- (a) the recommendations from the Task and Finish Group on the impact of the restructure in Revenues and Benefits, Customer Services, Cashiers and Incomes and Creditors which had been amended by the Management Board prior to be submitting for approval by Cabinet;

- (b) the Management's Board decision not to progress with social media Task and Finish Group.

The panel considered its tracking resolutions and noted the latest position.

73. **UNIVERSAL CREDITS**

The Financial and Social Inclusion Officer together with the Cabinet Member for Community Services (Safer and Stronger Communities and Leisure, Culture and Sport) provided a presentation to the panel on the overview of the welfare reform 2011 – 17, which included the following main areas –

- (a) the aim of the reform was to simplify the benefit system, to reduce expenditure on benefits and to get people back into work; the 10 key areas were –
- localisation of council tax benefit, business rates and social fund;
 - cost of living increase;
 - social care reform;
 - housing benefit/local housing allowance;
 - incapacity benefit/employment support;
 - universal credit;
 - tax credits;
 - the benefit cap;
- (b) the implications of the proposed changes for –
- housing benefit -
 - ▶ weekly losses to customers (£92.30);
 - ▶ impact on working families (up to 34 per cent reduction in benefit income);
 - social fund localisation –
 - ▶ 11,970 crisis loans approved in 2010/11;
 - ▶ 2,190 community care grants approved in 2010/11;
 - ▶ increase in houses without electricity or food;
 - council tax benefit –
 - ▶ protected groups – pensioners (43 per cent of claimants);
 - ▶ unprotected groups – working age claimants (57 per cent of claimants);
- (c) the key implications, included -

- the capping or removal of benefits;
- the reduction of income for a range of households;
- an increase in debt, illegal lending, payday loans and non payment;
- an increase need for information and advice services.

The following responses were provided to questions raised by the panel –

- (d) a written response would be provided regarding whether the Council currently funded the food bank and whether that funding would cease;
- (e) it would be difficult to provide detailed information, at this stage, regarding the potential impact of the proposals, as further guidance/information was awaited from the Government.

74. **PLYMOUTH LIFE CENTRE AND LEISURE RELATED PROJECTS PROGRAMME UPDATE**

The Director for People submitted an update report on the Plymouth Life Centre and leisure related projects programme. The Director for People, the Cabinet Member for Community Services (Safer and Stronger Communities and Leisure, Culture and Sport) and the Programmes Director outlined the following main areas –

- (a) Plymouth Life Centre –
 - practical completion of the building was reached on 27 February 2012 following a huge concerted effort from Balfour Beatty;
 - there was an issue with the ‘cage’ to the northern elevation of the building which created a whistling noise, under certain wind conditions; Balfour Beatty was working with their acoustic consultant to provide a solution to this problem;
 - the levels of asbestos in the Mayflower Centre and Central Park Pool would be assessed prior to its removal and disposal;
 - works to reinstate and landscape these areas would be completed within six months; the reinstatement works would result in the temporary spoil heaps located in Central Park being used to remodel the areas where the existing buildings were being demolished;
- (b) Leisure Management Contract –
 - the Plymouth Pavilions Leisure Pool, the Mayflower Centre and Central Park Pool would close on 18 March 2012;

- staff from the Plymouth Pavilions Leisure Pool, Mayflower Centre and Central Park Pool would transfer to Everyone Active (in accordance with the Transfer of Undertakings (Protection of Employment) Regulations 2006) on 19 March 2012;
- (c) Skate Park –
- the skate park was now fully open and operational.

The Cabinet Member for Community Services (Safer and Stronger Communities and Leisure, Culture and Sport) provided details of the opening of the Plymouth Life Centre. Local clubs and governing bodies were being invited to show case their sports. Activities would be free on Saturday 24 March 2012 (vouchers would be required to use the facility on Sunday 25 March 2012).

The following responses were provided to questions raised by the panel –

- (d) planning permission had been granted for the demolition of the Mayflower Centre and Central Park Pool which would commence following the assessment and removal of asbestos;
- (e) Balfour Beatty was currently working on a design solution to the whistling noise emanating from the 'cage' on the northern side of the building;
- (f) a written response would be provided to the panel regarding the outcome of the detailed discussions relating to the carer's leisure pass;
- (g) a written response would be provided to the panel regarding whether both the Mayflower Centre and Central Park Pool would be cordoned off as one area, or separately in order for the demolition works to commence; details of the demolitions were also required;
- (h) a written response would be provided regarding whether the road works along Outland Road could be completed in time for the opening of the Plymouth Life Centre;
- (i) the permanent traffic lights at the entrance/exit of the park and ride site would be operational by this afternoon;
- (j) 320 parking spaces were available in the Plymouth Life Centre dedicated car park which on the opening days would be marshalled; the park and ride car park would be used as an overflow facility; (Plymouth Argyle Football Club would be playing away); it was anticipated that visitors would use public transport, including the park and ride service;

- (k) discussions would continue with the bus companies regarding the provision of services to the facility on the opening days;
- (l) following criticism of the visitor centre within the Mayflower Centre the levels of staffing had been increased, additional terminals had been opened and a more comfortable waiting area had been installed;
- (m) the Football Association had made the decision not to invest in the Plymouth Life Centre, as they considered facilities in the area were adequate; football could be accommodated within the one third of the sports hall;
- (n) contingency plans had been put in place in consultation with the Council's partner agencies regarding the planned protest;
- (o) the Plymouth Life Centre had been delivered under budget.

75. **UPDATE SERIOUS ACQUISITIVE CRIME FIGURES**

The Director for People submitted a report on Serious Acquisitive Crime Figures. Councillor Jordan the Cabinet Member for Community Services (Safer and Stronger Communities and Leisure, Culture and Sport), the Community Safety Partnership Manager and DCI Colwill outlined the following main points –

- (a) Home Office figures released in January 2011 had shown that Devon and Cornwall was the third safest force area in England and Wales, showing 53 crimes per 1000 population compared to 76 nationally;
- (b) between 1 April 2011 and 20 February 2012 levels of overall crime in Plymouth had increased by three per cent (an increase of 547 crimes) compared to the same period last year; this was largely attributable to the increases in serious acquisitive crime, particularly dwelling burglaries and theft from motor vehicles;
- (c) currently there were six priority neighbourhoods that had recorded an increase in overall crime (Mutley/Greenbank, Whitleigh, East End, Devonport, Honicknowle and Morice Town);
- (d) the partnership efforts and interventions overall had seemed to have a positive impact on curbing the levels of serious acquisitive crime, which included –
 - Mutley/Greenbank had seen a fall in domestic burglaries between October 15 2011 and 8 February 2012; 17.2 per cent fewer burglaries were reported compared to the same period the previous year; also the detection rate had also improved in the same period, raising from 13.7 per cent to 24.5 per cent;

- between 1 April 2011 and 20 February 2012 numbers of 'theft from vehicles' was now only showing a rise of 1.1 per cent (plus nine) on the same period the year before; this represented a significant improvement on the position reported in October 2011 which at that point was showing a year to date increase of 19.7 per cent on the same period the year before;
 - as at the end of January 2012, a stable position had been reported within the similar family group for 'theft of motor vehicles' as third best and were currently showing a reduction of -9.8 per cent (minus 35);
 - Plymouth's position in its family group of similar cities for 'serious acquisitive crime' had improved to second best (out of 15) from third place;
 - Plymouth's position in its family group of similar cities for 'domestic burglary' had improved to third best (out of 15) from fourth place;
 - Plymouth's position in its family group of similar cities for 'theft of vehicles' had improved to second best (out of 15) from fourth place;
- (e) a significant amount of work had been undertaken to address the levels of serious acquisitive crime, such as –
- a surgery had been held for neighbourhood liaison officers in Stonehouse, East End, Mount Gould, Mutley/Greenbank and Stoke neighbourhoods, to support them in providing information and advice to disseminate to those communities most affected by serious acquisitive crime;
 - increased use of the Police CCTV Partnership Van across the city including the hotspots of serious acquisitive crime;
- (f) between 1 April 2011 and 20 February 2012 the levels of serious acquisitive crime rose by 10.6 per cent (an increase of 244) compared to the same period in the previous year; the number of dwelling burglaries had increased during the same period 27.5 per cent (an increase of 212) and the number of theft from vehicles had increased by 1.1 per cent (an increase of 9);
- (g) a wide range of work was being undertaken to address the increases in serious acquisitive crimes, which included –

- working on a multi agency response to the findings of the Offender Profile and development of an action plan to widen activities to lower level offenders;
- the continuation of the covert operations and activities by the police including the use of various 'bait' tactics.

The following responses were provided to questions raised by the panel –

- (h) figures had shown a displacement of criminal activity from Devonport to the north of the city; work was being undertaken to introduce accountability and ownership of geographical areas and the realignment of investigative resources which would provide more links with officers at a local level;
- (i) 'response targets' were being met across the city, although there were challenges in getting out to the outlying areas;
- (j) detection rates had increased;
- (k) there was no evidence to suggest that the reduction in the number of police officers was having a detrimental impact of the levels of crime;
- (l) a written response would be provided regarding the targeting of police resources relating to attendance at community/association and residents' meetings (in order to achieve the right level of engagement resulting in a reduction the crimes levels);
- (m) 'Smartwater' was currently having a positive impact on the detection of crimes by forensically linking offenders to the scene of the crime/stolen goods (particularly dwelling burglary and theft of/from vehicles).

76. LOCALITIES AND NEIGHBOURHOOD WORKING

The Localities Officer submitted a report on localities and neighbourhood working. The report highlighted the following main areas –

- (a) following the Task and Finish Group's review of localities and neighbourhood working in July 2011, the Overview and Scrutiny Management Board requested feedback on the following matters –
 - the role of community infrastructure and community anchor organisations in supporting neighbourhood working;
 - communication methods around neighbourhood working;

- (b) highlighted work that was currently taking place such as the involvement of Community and Social Action Plymouth (CASAP) in identifying anchor groups within neighbourhoods, how they can become involved and also increasing representation at meetings in five neighbourhoods;
- (c) looked at the most effective methods of communicating with members of the public at meetings, which included –
 - varying the venue and times according to the neighbourhood;
 - putting ‘Have Your Say’ posters on community notice boards. Libraries, schools, shops, community centres, etc;
 - publicizing two or three dates and venues well in advance and advertising them on ‘Your Neighbourhood’ web pages;
- (d) work was being undertaken to expand non meeting engagement methods which would include working with the Council’s partners to promote meeting dates to achieve the maximum effect and increase efforts to capture people’s view either within or outside of the meeting.

The following responses were provided to questions raised by the panel –

- (e) there were currently three neighbourhood liaison officer vacancies;
- (f) discussions had been held with the Devon and Cornwall Fire Service regarding their attendance at the neighbourhood meetings; there were difficulties in representatives from the service attending these meetings; although a commitment had been made to attend the key neighbourhood meetings;
- (g) senior officers had been allocated to a neighbourhood areas, in order to provide support and assistance to the neighbourhood liaison officers.

77. **JOINT FINANCE AND PERFORMANCE MONITORING REPORT SCORE CARDS**

The panel noted the report.

78. **BI ANNUAL SCRUTINY REPORT**

The panel noted its bi annual scrutiny report.

79. **WORK PROGRAMME**

The panel noted its work programme.

80. **MINUTES**

Agreed that the minutes of the meeting held on 23 January 2012 are confirmed as a correct record.

81. **EXEMPT BUSINESS**

There were no items of exempt business.