

Your Plymouth

Monday 4 November 2013

PRESENT:

Councillor Tuffin, in the Chair.

Councillor Michael Leaves, Vice-Chair.

Councillors Mrs Bowyer (substitute for Councillor Bowyer), Casey, Damarell, Philippa Davey, K Foster (substitute for Councillor Martin Leaves), Jarvis, Jordan, Rennie, Ricketts and Tuohy.

Co-opted Representative: Mr Steve Meakin.

Apologies for absence: Councillors Bowyer and Martin Leaves.

Also in attendance: Councillor Penberthy, Cabinet Member for Cooperatives and Community Development, Chief Superintendent Andy Boulting, Devon and Cornwall Police, Sarah Hopkins, Community Safety and Partnerships Manager, Chris Angle, Financial and Social Inclusion Officer, Dave Saunders, Interim Assistant Director for Customer Services, Darin Halifax, Lead Officer, and Katey Johns, Democratic Support Officer.

The meeting started at 4 pm and finished at 5.55 pm.

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.

20. **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

In accordance with the Code of Conduct, the following declaration of interest was made –

Name	Subject	Reason	Interest
Mr S Meakin	Personal Debt	Money Advice Co-ordinator, Devon and Cornwall working with Citizens Advice Bureau	Personal

21. **CHAIR'S URGENT BUSINESS**

Appointment of Vice-Chair

Agreed, in the absence of Councillor Bowyer, that Councillor Michael Leaves, is appointed Vice-Chair for this particular meeting only.

22. **MINUTES**

Agreed the minutes of the meeting held on 30 September 2013.

23. **PLYMOUTH COMMUNITY SAFETY PARTNERSHIP : CRIME FIGURES**

The Chair welcomed Councillor Penberthy, Chief Superintendent Andy Boulting and Sarah Hopkins who were in attendance to update the panel on the latest crime statistics for the city and on performance against the following five targets –

- Closing the gap in overall crime
- Acquisitive Crime
- Violence with Injury
- Criminal Damage
- Anti-Social Behaviour

Members were advised –

- (a) four out of the five were on target and the fifth – closing the gap in overall crime in neighbourhoods – was slightly off-target;
- (b) focus remained on the 10 priority neighbourhoods with four in particular having seen significant increases between April and August 2013 when compared to the same period last year, namely –
 - Stoke
 - Devonport
 - East End
 - Mutley
- (c) since production of the report, some of the neighbourhood statistics had changed and these changes were updated verbally as follows –

Area	% change in crime for the period 1 April to 20 October (compared to the same period the year before)
Stoke	45% (was 53%) - improving
Devonport	31% (was 41%) – improving
East End	20% (was 18%) – slightly worsening
Mutley	9.8% (was 18%) – improving
Plymouth City Centre	0.9% (was 3%) – improving
All Crime	4.4% (was 5.7%) – improving

- (d) of the wide range of crime reduction work being undertaken by the Council, Police and other key partners;
- (e) displacement continued to be a particular challenge;
- (f) Plymouth was fifth best out of 15 similar cities for overall crime.

In response to questions raised, Members heard further that –

- (g) regular meetings took place between the Police and Community Safety Partnership to look at incidents and discuss the tactical approaches required to mitigate the impact of displacement;
- (h) detection and conviction rates were available and could be shared with members if requested. There were different rates for different areas, for example the detection rate for shoplifting in the City was higher due to there being a higher level of surveillance and security presence;
- (i) the new Crime and Anti-Social Behaviour Bill was still working its way through Parliament and its progress was being carefully tracked by Community Safety Partnerships across the peninsula with consideration being given to training packages for staff, councillors and partners to help them understand the new tools, powers and costs;
- (j) the night time levy would apply to any premises serving alcohol after 12.30 am and therefore would not affect many premises outside of the city centre. The fund would be used to help mitigate the impact of the evening and night-time economy on residents.

The Chair thanked the Cabinet Member, Chief Superintendent and Community Safety and Partnerships Manager for their attendance.

24. **PERSONAL DEBT**

Further to a request made at its last meeting, the panel heard from the Cabinet Member for Cooperatives and Community Development, and Chris Angle, Financial and Social Inclusion Officer, on personal debt. Councillor Penberthy introduced the report, advising Members that it was only able to provide a snapshot of the current situation as it was based on information gathered from Advice Plymouth's customer base – just one of many agencies offering support and advice on debt.

In addition, to set the scene nationally, Steve Meakin reported that in England and Wales it was estimated that there were eight million people in debt.

In response to questions raised, Members were advised that –

- (a) during the period July to September 2013, 114 customers were seen by Advice Plymouth with a total of £1.5m problem debt;
- (b) in the last 12 months there had been significant increases in –
 - demand on the city's food bank;
 - water debt as people struggle to pay their water bills;

- council tax debt due to changes introduced in April;
- (c) the Council's Housing Options Department hosts an Advice Plymouth debt adviser at their customer services desk and any customer visiting with a housing issue would automatically be offered a consultation;
 - (d) take-up on the emergency welfare scheme was increasing and it was now anticipated that the entire fund would be spent by the end of the financial year;
 - (e) personal debt was dependent upon an individual's personal circumstances and was only a problem when it was unmanageable. Whilst one person's level of debt may be significant to them in terms of their ability to pay it back, that same level of debt may not be an issue for someone else;
 - (f) the cost of administering council tax liability orders was currently charged at £85 per head, with court costs for those in receipt of benefits or attachment of earnings being waived. However, work was under way to see if it was possible to bring that cost down.

The panel recognised that people dealt with unmanageable personal debt in different ways and that, whilst many may approach their creditors in the first instance or seek support and advice through one of the various agencies, there were also many who felt ashamed of their debt and were suffering silently.

Agreed that an in-depth cooperative review is undertaken on personal debt with time being taken, prior to commencement of the review, to gather the necessary data from as many support and debt advice agencies as possible.

(Steve Meakin declared a personal interest in respect of the above item).

25. **CUSTOMER SERVICES TRANSFORMATION**

Further to minute 18(1), the panel heard from Dave Saunders, Interim Assistant Director for Customer Services, on progress with implementing the Customer Services transformation programme. The presentation informed Members –

- (a) the Customer Services transformation programme was being driven by the Brilliant Cooperative Corporate Plan's Pioneering Plymouth objective;
- (b) of the Customer Services vision and principles;
- (c) that the programme had been reshaped due to –
 - Civic Centre decant
 - new City Centre shop

- budget pressures
 - transformation
- (d) of the three work streams which had been put in place as part of the transformation programme, along with expected delivery dates, namely –
- customer insight – Feb/March 2014
 - customer access and management model
 - customer led service design – First Quarter 2014
- (e) of highlights of the transformation project's progress to date which included –
- the completion of 10,000 survey forms with customers
 - identification of key groups of customers and their preferred channel of access
 - involvement of customers in future service re-design;
 - installation of wi-fi in libraries

In response to questions raised, Members were advised further that -

- (f) there would be quality monitoring put in place in terms of customer care standards to ensure staff were aware of them and putting them into practice;
- (g) the importance of honesty with customers was recognised in order ensure realistic expectations were met as opposed to setting unachievable targets;
- (h) the council was looking into the use of volunteers to staff libraries in order to expand opening hours and make them more accessible;
- (i) e-mails from staff containing no personal data were not good customer practice as they should be personalised and make someone accountable - this would be picked up and addressed through the customer care standards;
- (j) there was a way to ensure that numbers could be displayed when staff were making outgoing calls/returning customer's calls and this would be communicated to staff;
- (k) social media was very useful for pushing messages out, particularly in terms of traffic management when there had been an accident in the city and certain roads should be avoided or to issue warnings of bad weather, but not in terms of a two-way communication tool;
- (l) staff would be available at the end of a phone to back up on-line services.

The panel welcomed the progress update and the Chair thanked the Interim Assistant Director for Customer Services for his attendance.

Agreed that regular updates on progress with the Customer Services transformation programme are presented to the panel.

26. **TREE MANAGEMENT**

Having considered the briefing paper and statement provided in respect of Tree Management, Members asked that the following questions/concerns be passed to the Cabinet Member for Environment for response and/or comment –

- whether there was enough money in the budget to undertake the work required and for continued future tree management
- is the council's policy to cut down trees rather than maintain them if that is the cheaper option?
- does the council know which trees it owns and has responsibility for and is this information available in map form?
- were waiting lists being managed effectively or were people waiting too long?

Agreed that –

- (1) responses to the points raised would be sought from the appropriate Cabinet Member and circulated to panel Members via e-mail;
- (2) the issue of ownership would be added to the agenda for the next meeting.

27. **ROADSIDE MEMORIALS**

Members welcomed and supported the Roadside Memorial Guidance.

28. **PUBLIC FUNERALS**

Members welcomed the briefing paper and agreed that a short half-day cooperative review is undertaken in order to give consideration to the following –

- whether the wishes of family members should be accommodated in regard to timing of the Bereavement Service;
- should family members be notified of the date and time of the funeral even though they have not accepted responsibility for payment;
- whether family members who are not contributing to the cost of the funeral should be offered a choice of burial or cremation;
- where denomination of the deceased is known, should a minister be employed (currently incurs a fee of £179);
- services currently make no provision for flowers or grave markings – is that acceptable?

29. **TRACKING RESOLUTIONS**

The panel noted its tracking resolutions schedule.

30. **WORK PROGRAMME**

The Chair highlighted that, as a result of earlier decisions, the panel had now committed to undertake an additional two cooperative reviews, and had a third had been referred from the Cooperative Scrutiny Board –

- Personal Debt
- Public Funerals
- The effects of the expansion of Plymouth University and its students on the surrounding residential areas

In view of the above, and the potential impact on scrutiny arising from the transformation programme, the Chair suggested that the panel may wish to reconsider its work programme.

Agreed that the Chair and Vice-Chair review and re-prioritise the panel's work programme for 2013/14.

31. **EXEMPT BUSINESS**

There were no items of exempt business.