

Customers and Communities Overview and Scrutiny Panel

Monday 24 October 2011

PRESENT:

Councillor Thompson, in the Chair.

Councillor Peter Smith, Vice Chair.

Councillors Mrs Beer, Mrs Bowyer, Churchill, Davey, Delbridge, Martin Leaves, Mrs Nicholson, Penberthy, John Smith and Vincent.

Apology for absence: Dr A Jellings Co-opted Representative.

Also in attendance: DCI James Colwill (Devon and Cornwall Police), Jo Hambly (Financial and Social Inclusion Officer), Sarah Hopkins (Community Safety Partnership Manager), Councillor Jordan Cabinet Member for Community Services (Safer and Stronger Communities and Leisure, Culture and Sport)), Councillor Monahan (Cabinet Member for Adult Health and Social Care), Giles Perritt (Head of Performance, Policy and Partnerships) and Katy Shorten (Projects Officer).

The meeting started at 4.00 pm and finished at 5.40 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.

30. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

In accordance with the code of conduct, the following declarations of interest were made –

Name	Subject	Reason	Interest
Councillor Mrs Beer	Minute 35 Serious Acquisitive Crime Figures	Employed by Devon and Cornwall Police	Personal and Prejudicial
Councillor Delbridge	Minute 35 Serious Acquisitive Crime Figures	Son is employed by the Devon and Cornwall Police	Personal
Councillor Thompson	Minute 34 Strategic Framework for information and Advice Services Framework	Board Member of Citizens Advice Bureau	Personal

31. **MINUTES**

Agreed that the minutes of the meeting held on 12 September 2011 are confirmed as a correct record.

32. **CHAIR'S URGENT BUSINESS**

There were no items of Chair's urgent business.

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

The following items were included on the panel's tracking resolutions –

Min. 23(k) Plymouth Life Centre and Related Leisure Projects 12/09/11	the panel sought clarification on whether the initial problems encountered with Everyone Active's website had been addressed.
Min. 23(m) Plymouth Life Centre and Related Leisure Projects 12/09/11	the panel sought the details of the provision of direct bus services to the Plymouth Life Centre from across the city and the frequency of the services, particularly at weekends and evenings.
Min. 23(p) 12/09/11	the panel sought clarification on the following issues – 1. the joining up of the cycle routes to allow people to cycle to the facility; 2. the draft travel plan making no reference to Plymouth Argyle home matches; 3. the unquantifiable car movement targets; 4. the incentives on a reduction in the ticket price rather than a cup of coffee.

The Chair advised that the membership of the task and finish group to look at the anti social behaviour in the Compton Ward had changed; Councillor Churchill would be replacing Councillor Martin Leaves. The meeting had now been scheduled for Monday 28 November 2011.

The panel noted its tracking resolutions.

34. **STRATEGIC FRAMEWORK FOR INFORMATION AND ADVICE SERVICES FRAMEWORK**

The Director for Community Services submitted a report on the Strategic Framework for Information and Advice Services Framework. The report including the following main points –

- (a) good quality information and advice services were a central element of support for the Council's customers; this was particularly relevant at the present time due to the scale of changes relating to the reform of welfare benefits and the delivery of adult social care services;
- (b) providing the right information and advice in the right way would make a huge difference to customers' experiences of the changes and associated services;
- (c) the Council delivered a range of information and advice services relating to financial inclusion and adult social care, many of which were commissioned separately and related to different strategies including the Financial Inclusion Strategy 2009-12, Adult Social Care Market Position Statement 2011 and other agendas, such as worklessness, homelessness and child poverty;
- (d) the provision of these services had been reviewed against current need and in consultation with stakeholders; this review had suggested that there were benefits for the Council's customers, if a more holistic and joined up approach was taken to future provision;
- (e) in order to guide future provision, build on and update the Financial Inclusion Strategy 2009-12, it was proposed that the Council adopted a Strategic Framework for Information and Advice Services which would guide future commissioning and better align financial information and advice with adult social care advice giving services;
- (f) there was a total of £14m of benefits that had not been claimed.

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

- (g) the amount of unclaimed benefits related to a one year period within the Plymouth area (this figure had shown a year on year increase);
- (h) there was a wide range of reasons why benefits were not claimed; the take up of benefits was largely dependent on the social group, ie older people, families with children, etc;
- (i) a number of consultations were being undertaken to ascertain what people would like to see from the service;

- (j) it was important that the advice provided was enabling and empowering to allow people to resolve their own issues;
- (k) there had been no benefit 'take up' campaigns run this year;
- (l) there were a number of methods of communication that were currently being used such as First Stop, the main Council contact number 668000 as well as the Citizens Advice Bureau;
- (m) currently in discussions with the NHS on service provision;
- (n) a review was currently being undertaken by central government on how people applied for benefits; the introduction of universal credit would radically simplify the system for applying for benefits;
- (o) panel members would be provided with the link to e-perform, in order to access benefit performance data.

The panel agreed to recommend to the Overview and Scrutiny Management Board to adopt the Strategic Framework for Information and Advice Services (2012-15).

35. **SERIOUS ACQUISITIVE CRIME FIGURES**

The Director for Community Services 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 (53 crimes per 1000 population, compared to 75 nationally);
- (b) over a 12 month period (up to the end of August 2011), Plymouth continued to hold a steady position of being ranked fourth best (of 15) in its family group of similar cities for all crime;
- (c) between 1 April 2011 and week ending 18 September 2011, the level of overall crime in Plymouth had increased by 2.4 percent (234 crimes) compared to the same period last year; this was largely attributed to the increased levels of serious acquisitive crime, especially burglary dwelling and theft from motor vehicles;
- (d) crime levels were fluid and were sometimes subject to seasonal increases/decreases; a number of crimes can often be attributed to one or two known prolific offenders;
- (e) between 1 April 2011 and week ending 18 September 2011 the levels of serious acquisitive crime had risen by 16 per cent (an increase of 188 offences) compared to the same period last year;

- (f) the number of burglaries in dwellings had risen by 19 per cent (an increase of 85); thefts from vehicles had risen by 19 per cent (an increase of 90); despite this, in both cases, Plymouth had improved from fourth to third best in its most similar group of similar cities and were second best for theft of motor vehicle offences; numbers of each of these crime types are 'leveling off' at the time of this report;
- (g) the type of burglaries currently being committed were mainly break-ins into insecure premises which were likely to be committed by opportunist thieves;
- (h) some thefts from motor vehicles had included metal objects (from vans) and also opportunist 'smash and grab' offences where sat navs were targeted;
- (i) a wide range of work was being undertaken to address the increases in serious acquisitive crimes, which included –
 - the police undertaking a number of covert operations and activities;
 - running a community focus week in Mutley/Greenbank, which had led to arrests of offenders for vehicle crimes and burglaries;
 - preparing a problem profile on the hot spot areas for domestic burglaries which would help to further identify and target offenders and also determine times for additional patrols and interventions;
- (j) ● the crime profile report had identified burglary and theft from motor vehicle offences appeared to be being committed by a larger number of new/unknown offenders, committing a greater number of offences, rather than being linked to one or two known offenders to whom a large number of crimes were attributed.

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

- (k) the value of goods stolen from dwelling burglaries had decreased in the last 12 months (the value of stolen goods per dwelling in 2010 was £672 compared to £538.50 in 2011); high end value goods were not being targeted;
- (l) in order to encourage people to report crimes, the police through partner community safety events had been highlighting the importance of reporting crimes, including anti social behaviour;

- (m) there was no evidence to suggest that students were being victimised or indeed committing crimes; students tended to live in multi occupancy dwellings which were the least secure properties;
- (n) the police were concerned that information received on an informal basis might not have been logged by PCSOs (St Peter and the Waterfront Ward) as this information would not be included in any reported incidents data;
- (o) there had been multi agency support (which included PCSOs) for Operation Vocal in Whitleigh;
- (p) thefts from vehicles were mainly occurring on the public highway, outside of properties and overnight, rather than on private driveways or in the city centre car parks;
- (q) during the lead up to Christmas, campaigns were routinely run to make people aware that vehicle crime thieves operate at this time of year and will be again this year; people were also encouraged to hide sat navs and to also remove the mark from the windscreen;
- (r) the detection rate for burglary dwellings was 13.4 per cent and for vehicle crimes 9.4 per cent.

The panel agreed to –

- (1) provide information to the police regarding the reporting of informal incidents to PCSOs (St Peter and the Waterfront Ward);
- (2) bring this item back to its meeting scheduled for 12 March 2012 for an update focusing on the Police's experience of crimes, particularly burglary over the Christmas period.

36. **WORK PROGRAMME**

The Head of Policy, Performance and Partnership advised that the Overview and Scrutiny Management Board had agreed that he would draft the PID on social media in consultation with the Chair and Vice Chair.

The Chair advised that he had agreed in principle to the panel participating in scrutiny training but welcomed the view of panel members. The training would be delivered by an independent trainer who would meet with the panel one hour prior to its meeting in November. He would then observe the meeting and provide verbal feedback and constructive criticism. A written report would also be provided to the following meeting. Panel members would be asked to choose two subjects they wished to receive training on (these subjects would have been previously agreed).

Councillors raised concerns regarding the provision of training during normal working hours which proved difficult for those councillors in full time employment to attend.

The panel agreed to –

- (1) participate in the scrutiny training on 21 November 2011;
- (2) change the time of the meeting from 4pm to 5pm (training would therefore commence at 4pm);
- (3) raise with the Overview and Scrutiny Management Board the issue of the provision of training during normal working hours which made it difficult for those councillors in full time employment to attend.

37. **EXEMPT BUSINESS**

There were no items of exempt business.

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