

MINUTES OF THE SCRUTINY REVIEW - SAFER AND STRONGER COMMUNITIES TARGETS

TUESDAY, 25 SEPTEMBER 2007

Councillors *Egan (Chair), Bloch and *C. Harris

*Member present

LC1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE (IF ANY)

An apology for absence was received from Councillor Bloch.

LC2. URGENT BUSINESS

None.

LC3. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

None.

LC4. TERMS OF REFERENCE/PROGRESS WITH REVIEW

The Panel noted that the review would be looking at the funding of actions to meet the Safer and Stronger Communities targets within the Local Area Agreement (LAA). There were concerns that the current method of funding was not conducive to the meeting effectively the Borough's LAA targets or addressing residents concerns due to an over reliance on short term grant funding, much a which was due to expire shortly.

The Panel felt that it would be useful to look at how other local authorities funded their activities. It was suggested that Barnet, Camden or Lambeth might provide useful comparisons, particularly as they used a higher proportion of mainstream funding.

The Chair reported that the date of the next meeting would now need to be changed due to a clash with the Alexandra Palace and Park Consultative Committee.

AGREED:

1. That the scope and terms of reference for review, as approved by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee, be noted.
2. That a visit to interview relevant staff at a nearby local authority about the structure and funding arrangements for their Community Safety activities be arranged.

LC5. RESOURCING OF SAFER AND STRONGER COMMUNITIES TARGETS UNDER THE HARINGEY LOCAL AREA AGREEMENT (LAA)

The Panel received evidence from Wayne Mawson, Deputy Police Commander for Haringey, Shaun Sweeney, Police Projects Officer and Claire Kowalska, Community Safety Strategic Manager.

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The Panel noted that community safety initiatives were funded with a high proportion of money from external time limited grants. This had a number of disadvantages. The delivery of initiatives often required considerably high levels of skill from staff and consequently high quality personnel were required. The time limited nature of funding for posts did not assist recruitment and retention. It could deter suitably qualified people from applying and inhibit the development of staff as the skills required to undertake the work were complex and took time to learn. Long term planning was difficult as funding decisions on changes to grant regimes were often taken at short notice and inconvenient times. Reductions in the Safer Stronger Communities Fund (SSCF) had been announced in June and these had the potential to lead to redundancies for Haringey staff. In addition, making applications for grants and monitoring them once they had been received was a very time consuming process. If commissioning was undertaken over a longer period of time, economies of scale could be made.

Many community safety initiatives and responsibilities were now statutory as well as covering areas of key concern for local residents. The workload within specific teams had increased markedly. The Youth Offending Service and the Anti Social Behaviour Action Team had seen a doubling in demand for their services. In addition, the strategic planning function was also very important. This involved working on the targets and national standards, analysing data and capacity building. A new performance regime was soon to be introduced with the introduction of APACS (Assessment of Policing and Community Safety). In addition, reporting of crime was being more actively encouraged and this was likely to increase workload further. Police successes in apprehending young offenders was a factor in increasing pressure on the Youth Offending Service, who were required to undertake work with such young people in order to assist in their rehabilitation.

Staff in posts for which the funding was due to expire shortly were facing redundancy and it would be unsurprising if their performance suffered in such circumstances. All of the Police officers who were involved in Safer Community Partnership work were supported by mainstream funding. It was felt that consideration needed to be given to funding more of the Safer and Stronger Communities work through mainstream funding.

Community safety was a partnership and there was a statutory responsibility for partners to actively participate and contribute. The Police Service and Council currently tended to assume a large part of the responsibility but it could be argued that other partners should take a more active and equal role. However, some of the other partners were constrained by limited resources.

The main drivers for crime were linked closely to health, well being, education and housing and therefore mainstream activity by relevant partners in these areas was a considerable source of influence. Section 17 of the Crime and Disorder Act 1998 stated that all policies, strategies, plans and budgets of local authorities needed to be considered from the standpoint of their potential contribution to the reduction of crime and disorder and it should therefore be a mainstream part of the business of all partners. Consideration needed to be given to how these responsibilities could be developed and given proper recognition amongst all services. In particular, more active participation by a wider range of partners within the Safer Communities Partnership would be welcome.

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There had not been a strategy of applying for all grants that were available. In any case, it was now much tougher to obtain external funding and making applications was very time consuming. Such funding that was available now tended to be directed at the "third sector". The current strategy was to consider the problem rather than focussing on potential sources of funding. A proportion of funding obtained through external sources by Haringey currently went on staffing whilst the remainder went on the particular programme associated with the money. An increase in the number of mainstream funded posts would not necessarily mean foregoing the opportunity to bring in external funds. It would mean that, when such funds were obtained, more would be available for the specific programmes rather than the staff required to deliver them. Partners could give consideration to looking collectively at the range of current activity and deciding what was critical and therefore could be considered for mainstreaming. In such circumstances, LAA delivery funding that remained could be used to fund anything additional that was considered to be necessary by partners.

In respect of the LAA targets, the Panel noted that these were arrived at following negotiation with the Government Office for London. There was some scope for them to be amended to take account of local conditions.

The concerns of residents did not always replicate what crime data suggested. Whilst street crime, burglary and car theft were the key issues for law enforcement agencies, local people were more concerned about young people, violence and drugs. In particular, people were frightened by yobbish behaviour. There was a lack of recreational opportunities for young people. However, there were organisations and people with the potential to provide such opportunities who, with appropriate support and development, would be able to deliver them. If less LAA money was spent on funding posts, there would be more available to undertake this type of work.

It was noted that there were a range of structural configurations amongst local authorities for where strategic Community Safety teams were located and examples of alternative options and reporting lines could be considered by the Panel.

The Panel thanked Mr. Mawson, Mr. Sweeny and Ms Kowalska for their contribution.

LC6. NEW ITEMS OF URGENT BUSINESS

None.

LC7. DATE OF NEXT MEETING.

It was noted that the time and/or date of the next meeting would need to be changed from 23 October. An alternative time/date would be notified in due course. It was agreed that representatives from the Haringey Council Finance Service, Haringey TPCT, the College of North East London and the Government Office for London would be invited to attend.

Cllr Pat Egan

Chair

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