

**MINUTES OF THE SCRUTINY REVIEW - SUPPORT FOR VICTIMS OF CRIME
THURSDAY, 14 JANUARY 2010**

Councillor Aitken (Chair), Davies and Egan
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LC20. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

None.

LC21. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST.

None.

LC22. LATE ITEMS OF URGENT BUSINESS.

None.

LC23. MINUTES

AGREED:

That the minutes of the meeting of 26 November and 8 December 2009 be approved.

LC24. SUPPORT TO VICTIMS OF CRIME - EVIDENCE FROM STAKEHOLDERS

The Panel received evidence from Luciana Frederick from the Children and Young People's Service (C&YPS) and Mike Bagnall from the Anti Social Behaviour team.

Ms. Frederick reported that the C&YPS provided £38,700 to Victim Support. This had been provided in six month blocks whilst the grant was being reviewed. Concerns had been expressed at this by Victim Support due to the affect that this was having on their service. A review was being commissioned on the work of Victim Support by the Community Safety Service and C&YPS. This would review the delivery of services to young victims and best value. Criteria for the new service would then be jointly be developed. In particular, it would look at how the service could best relate to young people. A low percentage of young people who had been victims currently reported crime. A joined up approach across the Youth Offending Service, C&YPS and Victim Support was required. Members of the Panel indicated that they would endorse a review of what was currently provided.

Mr. Bagnall reported that the Anti Social Behaviour team (ASBAT) had a key role in encouraging victims to report anti social behaviour. Although the service was widely publicised, some residents were unaware of its existence and how to report incidents. Work was being undertaken with the Council's communications service to further publicise it. The service was proactive and visited areas where they knew that there had been problems but had not received any reports about in order to encourage people to come forward. The service had a dedicated anti social behaviour telephone line and was one of the first to have one.

There were significant issues relating to young people. The team had linked into 33 primary schools and 8 secondary schools so far and had provided training for teachers. Whilst schools had to have a policy on bullying and harassment, few had procedures to deal with it. The obligations of schools extended beyond school gates.

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ASB reports received from young people and schools were very low in number. The service had introduced texting of reports and the use of live messaging but there had been little take up.

Support was available for schools if requested. It was noted that some schools were issuing their own acceptable behaviour contracts (ABCs) but these had no official status. Ones issues by the ASBAT were recognised officially and monitored. These had to be witnessed by a Police officer.

There was an issue with the willingness of schools to work with others – all that the service could do was to continue to visit schools. The Home Office was impressed with the work that had been undertaken with schools but there was no funding for this work and officers had to be taken away from their casework to undertake it. Members of the Panel felt that there was a potential role for specific governors to act as “champions”. Another option would be for information about anti social behaviour and reporting of incidents to be put on school websites, although schools might feel that this was interference.

The Home Office regarded the work undertaken by the ASBAT as representing best practice. Where legal action was taken, officers did their best to support victims but had limited time. As much of the legal action that the ASBAT was involved went through the civil courts, there was not the same support available as there was for criminal cases. Approaches had been made to the Crown Court and the Magistrates Court about assistance with support and accessing the services of Witness Support and they had been happy to accommodate them. However, the County Court was unable to provide the same service.

As part of the Justice Seen, Justice Done scheme, grant funding had been obtained from the Home Office for a witness support officer for the ASBAT. An appointment to this post had already been made. The post holder would deal exclusively with support for ASB victims and witnesses. This would include pre trial visits to court and attendance at court with victims and witnesses on dates of hearings. The postholder was employed by Victim Support but located within the ASBAT. Funding was only in place until 2011.

Mediation was available and provided via Camden Mediation Services. It was generally used in lower level cases and paid for on a case by case basis. Some other Councils had an in-house service but the set up costs could be very expensive.

ASB service standards had been reviewed in the light of the recent Leicestershire case. The Home Office now wanted clear service standards setting out the level of service that people could expect.

It was hard to know why few referrals were received from young people or schools. It was felt that many young people accepted being victimised through, for instance robbery of mobile phones, as normal. Such incidents were common. Young people had said that they sometimes reported incidents to teachers but action rarely happened.

The issue of postcode gangs was touched on in workshops at schools. There was a multi agency group on gangs. The ASBAT knew who most of the key individuals within them were and undertook joint work with the Police, who had a dedicated anti

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social behaviour team. Action had been undertaken against gang Members and there was close liaison with Police Safer Neighbourhood Teams (SNTs). Applications for ASBOs and Dispersal Orders had to be endorsed by the Council. There were protocols for the closure of crack houses and the Police were required to consult with the Council on these. Particular attention was given to the support needs of those affected by the closure.

If reports of anti social behaviour were individual or “one to one” issues, full details of witnesses were required. Sometimes alleged victims had subsequently been found to be perpetrators. If the issue was more general, the team could pick it up and seek further evidence through leafleting and knocking on doors. However, if people were not willing to take a stand, not much could be done. Efforts were made to reassure victims but no absolute guarantee of safety could be given.

The service had been provided with one additional officer from this financial year and this had made a big difference, particularly as it was Council funded. The service now had 8 ASB officers plus a CCTV officer. There were 100 cases and 2,500 reports to deal with at any one time. The vast majority of the service was funded by grants. These had not increased since 2002 which meant that the service was under increasing financial pressure every year. It was felt that the Council now needed to start looking at mainstream funding rather than grants and consider the future direction of the service. There had already been talk of a 10% cut in funding for next year. The budget for the service (by way of grant) was £280,000 and all of this was used for salaries. The total running costs of the service was approximately £700,000 of this, only one post was funded by the Council. Resources for community engagement work, for which there was currently no budget, would be welcome. In addition, it was potentially unsafe for the CCTV officer to work alone and assistance for the post would therefore be very welcome.

The Panel thanked Ms Frederick and Mr Bagnall for their kind assistance.

**Cllr Ron Aitken
Chair**