

NEATH PORT TALBOT COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL

Community Safety and Public Protection Scrutiny Sub Committee

27 July 2017

Report of the Head of Corporate Strategy and Democratic Services – Karen Jones

Matter for Decision

Wards Affected: All Wards

Proposed Response to the Welsh Local Government Association in Connection with the Welsh' Government's Review of Community Safety

Purpose of Report

To consult the Community Safety and Public Protection Sub-Committee on a proposed response to the Welsh Local Government Association in connection with the Welsh' Government's review of community safety.

Background

In February 2017, the Cabinet Secretary for Communities and Children announced a review of community safety in Wales. The main features of the review are reproduced below:

“The purpose of the group is to ensure the delivery of a high quality evidence-based review following the Wales Audit Office report

Community Safety in Wales. In part, it seeks to address the issues raised in that document. However, the remit of the review and the group is wider and will examine the way public services in Wales work together to help make our communities safer and to develop an ambitious, shared vision within which organisations work together more effectively.

The review will make recommendations for:

- Establishing a strategic vision for community safety in Wales which all organisations involved understand, share and build into their national, regional and local planning;
- A sustainable approach to partnership working in Wales developed through the collection and analysis of evidence including UK-wide and international evidence about what works;
- Understanding, defining and clarifying the range of stakeholders and their leadership roles, including that of Welsh Government, police and crime commissioners, local authorities and Whitehall departments
- Creating stronger, more effective and more accountable leadership from all agencies and organisations
- Reflecting the new clarity around leadership by streamlining and simplifying governance to enhance accountability while refocusing activity so as to avoid duplication, and confusion
- Achievement of the well being objectives published alongside the Taking Wales Forward Programme for Government
- Ensuring delivery in accordance with the Taking Wales Forward Programme for Government.

It will take account of the wider political and policy context including:

- UK and Welsh legislation and whether there is a need for further reform, including opportunities offered by the Wales Act 2017
- UK policy, for example in prison reform and developments in youth justice and community cohesion and around Police and Crime Commissioners, etc.
- the single planning process through public service boards

- Interdependencies between devolved and non-devolved responsibilities (including Police and Crime Commissioners) and the potential for better alignment
- Welsh Government's proposals for the reform of local government and in particular the regionalisation of services.

I do not intend to create a group that just debates the issues but one that can bring real expertise to the area and will have the credibility to make real change. The Oversight Group will be streamlined, consisting of a small number of representatives of the key services drawn from local government, fire and rescue services, police and crime commissioners, Youth Justice Board Cymru, police chiefs, probation and prison services, Community Justice Cymru and UK government departments. The review itself, however, will be as inclusive as possible.

I anticipate the first meeting of the Oversight Group taking place early in March followed quickly by publication of the terms of reference and questions to pose to stakeholders during a summer consultation and gathering of evidence, research and perspectives from all quarters.”

Subsequent to the review being announced, officers have met with Welsh Government officials to provide information about existing community safety arrangements, strengths and challenges. The Welsh Local Government Association has recently asked for input from local authorities and the proposed response to the questions they have posed is set out for consideration.

Financial Impact

There is not financial impact associated with this report directly.

Equality Impact Assessment

No equality impact assessment is needed for this report.

Workforce Impact

There is no direct workforce impact arising from this report.

Legal Impact

The Council has a range of statutory duties under the Crime and Disorder Act 1998 and the Police and Justice Act 2006.

Crime and Disorder Impact

The Council has a legal duty under section 17 of the Crime and Disorder Act 1998 to carry out all its various functions with “due regard to the need to prevent crime and disorder in its area”. It is therefore important that the Council responds to the request from WLGA for information to inform the Cabinet Secretary’s review.

Risk Management

Risks associated with community safety arrangements have been identified within the draft response.

Recommended

That Scrutiny Members consider the proposed response and offer further comments and contributions for inclusion.

Appendices

Appendix 1 – Draft response to WLGA call for evidence.

List of Background Papers

Welsh Government – working together for safer communities, written statement 27th February 2017.

Officer Reporting

Mrs Karen Jones, Head of Corporate Strategy and Democratic Services
Tel: 01639 763284 or e-mail: k.jones3@npt.gov.uk

Neath Port Talbot County Borough Council
Welsh Government Review of Community Safety
Draft response to WLGA call for evidence

Overview

Neath Port Talbot County Borough Council has maintained a strong commitment to community safety and the associated partnership since the Crime and Disorder Act 1998 was enacted.

The lead responsibility for community safety at officer level sits with the Head of Corporate Strategy and Democratic Services and political support for community safety has been strengthened in the current political administration with the creation of a portfolio within the Cabinet for Community Safety and Public Protection and more latterly with the Leader of Council becoming the WLGA spokesperson for community safety.

The Community Safety Partnership is a functioning partnership co-chaired by the Head of Corporate Strategy and Democratic Services and the Superintendent (Partnerships) of the Western BCU. It continues to discharge the statutory functions and is accountable to the Public Services Board for delivering the agreed priorities. The partnership has also overseen implementation of the Violence Against Women, Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence Act 2016, Counter-terrorism and Security Act 2015, Anti-social behaviour and other legislation, response to the WG Community Cohesion Plan and is actively working with the Area Planning Board to ensure the Board works appropriately and effectively with the wider community safety partnership framework.

Strategic priorities for the Community Safety Partnership are:

1. To implement the Violence Against Women, Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence Act, improving outcomes for those affected by these offences;
2. Strengthen preventative and enforcement work in relation to substance misuse, including new psychoactive substances;
3. To equip the general population with the knowledge of how to stay safe on-line to protect themselves against the risk of cyber-crime; and
4. To ensure there is a proportionate local response to the risk that people might be drawn into terrorism and extremism.

Operationally, the Community Safety Team, employed by the Council and co-located with the police at Neath Police Station are focused, with relevant partners and the community, on a wide range of issues, some of which include:

1. Preventing and addressing anti-social behaviour;
2. Tackling anti-social behaviour and other crime and disorder affecting the town centres;
3. Responding to spikes in crime and disorder as identified from evidence;
4. Engaging with the community to prevent crime to keep the county borough a safe place to live, work and visit – this involves working with a very wide range of stakeholders including young people through Crucial Crew, residents through Paws and Patrol to name just a small number of examples;
5. Preventing and tackling hate crime and building community cohesion;
6. Strengthening partnership working with the business sector to prevent and tackle business-related crime;
7. Reducing the risk of arson in vacant commercial properties;
8. Working with the road safety partnership to secure continued casualty reduction but also to prevent and address vehicle and cycle related crimes.
9. Supporting and developing the community alcohol partnership in Pontardawe
10. Working with the Youth Offending Service to divert young people from the criminal justice system.

Response to Specific Questions:

- **How effective do you think Community Safety Partnerships have been over the past 4 years or so in tackling crime and disorder and promoting community safety? What has supported/enabled any successes and/or have there been any barriers/specific difficulties to progress you would wish to highlight?**

The county borough continues to be a safe place to live, work and visit (relatively) so in that context the Community Safety Partnership has continued to be effective. The key factors in securing continued success has been the leadership commitment of the Council to community safety and the ability of the Council to secure continuity in its experienced Community Safety Team alongside the continued commitment of our community safety partners. There have been short periods where the work of the Partnership has been disrupted due to the departure of key individuals but this is a recognised feature of partnership working. The fragmented and short term nature of funding to support community safety partnerships is an obvious frustration – an example being that some posts within the Community Safety Team remain fixed term appointments after ten or more years of employment.

There is no doubt that the nature of work that the community safety partnership is now engaging in is different in many respects to the agenda that existed when such partnerships were first conceived of. The Community Safety Team were instrumental in bringing attention to the rise in use of new psychoactive substances and launched an effective campaign through schools and with parents to protect young people from these substances; the Team chairs the Channel Panel which seeks to protect people identified as being vulnerable to being drawn into terrorism and extremism; and the Team is leading the work to develop a strategy to improve outcomes for people affected by violence against women, domestic abuse and sexual violence. This illustrates an agenda that has moved very much towards protecting vulnerable people with more and more complexity involved in the work. At the same time, the team has to still maintain vigilance in preventing more traditional forms of crime - for example the Team was instrumental in alerting the community to a spike in burglaries in

the last year and has worked with the fire and rescue service to develop a community risk register, identifying arson risk related to commercial premises.

Community safety work has not been assisted by fragmentation at policy level. For example, the decisions taken to establish regional youth offending teams with their own discrete governance arrangements; CONTEST regional boards with no consideration as to how this new work should feed into existing community safety arrangements; VAWDASV legislation that did not factor in the relationship to existing work within community safety partnerships; the Social Services and Wellbeing Act population assessments that have drawn in Area Planning Board activity with a consequential bias almost wholly towards treatment with the consequential detrimental impact on education, prevention and enforcement; the development of community cohesion programmes which take little account of existing community safety work. There is also of course the ongoing tension between work being developed in the devolved administration and work that continues to be the domain of the Home Office – this is very evident when conducting Domestic Homicide Reviews.

In short, the community safety landscape is now a complex one as illustrated by the Auditor General in his study - but it does not need to be so. There is a clear opportunity to work through the Public Services Board infrastructure to establish the key risks and threats to community safety and to agree a programme of partnership activity to address current and predicted threats and risks. Where wider area collaboration is beneficial that is already happening to a significant extent and has been hampered in recent times by the considerable uncertainty placed over local government by the prospect of local government reorganisation. Clarity on desired outcomes, rather than continued uncertainty about structures and funding would create the conditions for community safety partnerships (or the next iterations of these) to mature and perform.

Is there still the same level of commitment and involvement from partners in the work of CSPs? Are the statutory responsibilities of the CSP still being met? Please explain your response.

Yes, statutory responsibilities are still being met but there will always be scope for improvement. There is good commitment from most partners but because of the fragmentation of policy, some partners find themselves being caught between competing demands of their various stakeholders. There does not appear to be any mechanism to join up the priorities of government with the priorities that emerge from local community safety partnerships. Nor is there a forum for debating the key strategic issues and sharing learning. There seems to be no real understanding in some parts of government of the existing legal frameworks with new duties being created without an explicit assessment of how the new legislation impacts upon the existing duties and responsibilities. And there is inadequate assessment of the financial resources needed to discharge new duties with the result that local government has new burdens without the resources to discharge them.

- **What effect, if any, has the changed and reduced funding mechanisms of CSPs had in terms of the work it can undertake? If resources have reduced, what impact has this had? Have you been able to secure appropriate levels of funding from PCCs? Have you been able to secure funding from other sources to support the work of your CSP?**

Because we benefit from a very experienced Community Safety Team, to date, we have been able to secure adequate funding to maintain and develop our activities. Additionally, because the Council has made clear commitments to Community Safety and its workforce, we have been able to secure continuity in our Community Safety Team who have been able to adapt to an increasingly complex landscape.

The proposal to regionalise VAWDASV funding is not helpful and will add more complexity and cost to an already complex landscape. Rather than agreeing the outcomes we need to deliver upon we are being distracted by an agenda to compel more regional working. It is somewhat ironic given that we have been asked for a Western Bay plan with the threat that the grant will be withdrawn and this week the Cabinet Secretary for Health has announced the AMBU footprint will shrink from three to two local authority areas. And of course the legislation actually placed a duty on us and the health boards to produce strategies for the local

authority area. A further source of frustration is the withdrawal of the Home Office funding that supports IDVA services. Without replacement funding from the PCC this service is at risk.

On a more positive note, we have welcomed the commitment of the PCC to maintain funding and provide as much certainty as can be reasonably possible with as little bureaucratic overhead as possible. We would like to see more pilot projects in our local authority area and we look forward to discussing the potential for that with the PCC. We have good support from the Assistant PCC in our Community Safety Partnership. We are very interested in exploring how we can develop our information assets to evolve partnership working in a digital age and believe that we have good opportunities to exploit this if capacity allows us to innovate and take partnership working to a different phase.

We would not have been able to maintain our Community Safety Team without other contributions. We have been able to secure these resources because of the investment the Council has been able to continue to commit in terms of political and professional leadership input.

- **What do you think could or needs to be changed/amended to make the work of CSPs more effective and impactful? How can they more effectively link in and influence the work of local/regional strategic partnerships (e.g. PSBs) and maximise impact?**

The work of the CSP is aligned with the PSB and has been appropriately factored into the Population Assessment work. This was only achievable because all of the strands of work were co-ordinated by the Head of Corporate Strategy and Democratic Services in this authority. It is clearly not the case everywhere as the problem is at policy level where there does not appear to be any co-ordination or impact assessment being undertaken. We have previously offered to help WLGA provide more co-ordination at strategy level around these areas of work. This could be organised on a police area basis. We offer our support again to supplement the capacity that WLGA have in place to support this work. Given the retirement of some community safety managers at operational level and the dissolution of WACSO we believe this is even more important than when we originally suggested it.

- **What are your views on regional working in tackling community safety (with community safety highlighted as a potential area for regional working in WG's White Paper on local government reform)? Do you have any views on any preferred footprint or governance arrangements for working regionally on community safety issues?**

This Council has already submitted a full response to the White Paper and has not changed its views on the mandatory regional footprint proposals.

The health board footprint in this region is to change, consequently, had we planned to work on the Western Bay regional footprint that would have been abortive work.

We have already identified areas of work where more consistency of approach across the Western BCU would be of mutual benefit and intend to take that work forward irrespective of any mandatory footprints; we have identified a smaller number areas where shared delivery/commissioning would be mutually beneficial but there are equally many areas where partnership working at neighbourhood level remains crucially important.

Earlier in this paper we referenced a preference to have a strategic forum at police area level. This is a forum that served authorities and partners well previously and could provide the impetus for re-imagining partnership working in a digital and more complex age.

Other Comments

We would welcome an opportunity to have a conference at a South Wales Police area level on the strategic priorities we all have in common. The wellbeing assessment we have recently completed would be a key input from our PSB to such a forum. We believe partnership working has and continues to change. It is important that the agenda is properly informed from communities and from practitioners and that steps are taken to bring coherence to an incoherent policy framework. Whereas the Home Office provides the coherence at a UK level there seems to be no equivalent at the Welsh level which may explain the position as illustrated by the Auditor General in his report. Uninformed, mandated regional working will simply add to complexity and divert

scarce resources from doing work that delivers real outcomes for people into unnecessary bureaucracy.

Further contact:

Mrs Karen Jones, Head of Corporate Strategy and Democratic Services
01639763284 or email: k.jones3@npt.gov.uk