

Community Safety and Public Protection Scrutiny Sub Committee

(Via Microsoft Teams)

Members Present:

9 July 2021

Chairperson: Councillor S.K.Hunt

Vice Chairperson: Councillor R.L.Taylor

Councillors: D.Cawsey, C.J.Jones, S.Pursey, S.Rahaman, N.T.Hunt, S.Bamsey and S.M.Penry

Officers In Attendance: C.Plowman, E.Wellington, C.Jones and C.Millis, M.Otteson and G.Prosser

Invitees: Councillors L.Jones, A.Wingrave, W.F.Griffiths, J.Hale and M.Protheroe,

1. **Minutes of Previous Meeting**

The minutes of the meeting held on 17 February 2020 were approved.

2. **Community Safety - Anti Social Behaviour Update**

Members were updated on the Anti-Social Behaviour (ASB) issues within Neath Town Centre and were provided with information in relation to the work that was currently being carried out around this high-profile issue.

The Head of Participation explained that the Partnerships and Community Cohesion Team was now part of the Education, Leisure and Lifelong Learning Directorate and had been since January 2021; the Team was praised for the work they had been doing and continue to do across Neath Port Talbot.

It was highlighted that the Community Safety Team, which was a small team made up of 11 Officers, dealt with very complicated and complex issues; they had used, tried and tested methodologies around a problem solving approach to address the root causes of the issues. It was added that the Team had close links with key partners

and internal teams, which were very inherent in the work that was needed to be carried out.

Aside from managing ASB within the County Borough, it was added that the Community Safety Team also managed areas such as Domestic Abuse, Hate Crime, and Community Cohesion; since the start of the pandemic, they also had responsibility of the Neath Port Talbot Safe and Well Service.

Members were informed that in July 2020, Officers were made aware of increasing concerns around ASB in the Neath Town Centre area; these concerns were raised mainly through social media, which was not a formal route of reporting into services. It was noted that residents and businesses had been speaking to local Councillors about issues relating to street drinking, noise nuisance, begging and other general ASB; it was perceived that the cause of these issues was due to the usage of the Ambassador Hotel by the Council's Housing Option Service, since the start of the pandemic.

Officers stated that official reports to the Police and to Council staff were very low and it was felt that when looking at the issues raised on social media, this may not have been a true reflection of what was happening in the town, which was a concern for Officers.

The importance of reporting concerns and information in the right way was stressed; members of the public could do this in a number of ways. It was explained that if the evidence and the statistics were not included in the database to reflect what was actually happening in the area, it minimised certain powers and the Officers abilities in finding solutions to the problems.

Following these concerns, it was noted that the Community Safety Team called a partnership meeting to better understand the problems, look at who was at the centre of the issues and to consider an appropriate action plan to ensure the situation improved and did not deteriorate; the first meeting was held in July 2020, coordinated by Community Safety. It was mentioned that the Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Community Safety and Public Protection chaired the meeting and the relevant Cabinet Members and ward Councillors also attended; there was representation from a number of partner agencies including South Wales Police (SWP), Housing Options, WCADA, Licensing, Streetcare, Salvation Army, Neath Business Improvement District (BID) and Business Crime Reduction Partnership (BCRP).

From the outset, it was stated that the partner buy in was excellent and all subsequent meetings were very well attended; there was a will from all partners to take action and instigate change in the area, especially as there were a lot of individuals involved in the meetings who were residents of the area themselves.

The group decided to take a 'two pronged' approach, which consisted of the following:

1. To identify who was at the centre of the issues and ensure appropriate support was available for those people, and that appropriate measures could be put in place to resolve the issues of ASB. This approach was noted to be favourable as those involved in ASB were often extremely vulnerable and had complex needs, therefore it was important to identify the root causes;
2. To continue to encourage residents to report any issues through to the right channels, to better equip services with the evidence needed to address the problems.

It was explained that the group also agreed to series of short term, immediate actions to address the current problem and to also look at longer term, more strategic actions, to ensure the problems did not reoccur; there was an understanding by all that this would not be an overnight process and would take considerable resource and effort from all partners.

Officers highlighted that there was also a need to work towards improving public perception of the town as some issues were exacerbated by social media and sometimes made problems appear worse than they may have been.

The Committee was provided with details in relation to some of the immediate actions taken:

- Licensing colleagues were asked to visit all local licensed premises in the town centre, to remind them of responsible selling and to brief them of the ongoing issues;
- Housing Options and SWP had been and continued to meet regularly to discuss and identify the individuals of most concern, which could also allow for individual actions plans to be developed if needed;
- Increased Police presence in the town;
- Several press releases and social media posts were published to encourage reporting through to the correct channels, to allow

all partners to have a true reflection of concerns and to have hard evidence to take further action against those causing the issues;

- Officers explored section 35 Dispersal Orders, Community Protection Warnings, Community Protection Notices and Criminal Behaviour Orders for those identified. The process of the various warnings, notices and orders were explained, however coupled with this Officers added that they also try to ensure that the people of concern were given the opportunity to access the right support in order to try and make positive changes;
- To offer more diversionary activities and outreach support to those accommodated in the Ambassador. It was noted that this particular piece of work had been challenging, as it was during the height of the pandemic where services were hugely impacted by the home-working arrangements and the general health and safety with the transmission of the virus; WACADA and other services had looked into this to try and give people various activities to undertake during the day.

Officers provided information in relation to some of the longer term actions that were agreed:

- To work with wider council colleagues on the Regeneration Programme for Neath Town Centre. It was mentioned that one of the ideas within this was to improve the general look and feel of the town to encourage others to visit the town centre and make it a better place for the residents to live, work and socialise;
- To employ more town centre staff to have an increased presence in the town;
- To consider longer term Police operations to address the issues;
- To speak to Welsh Government about funding to increase provision of Housing Options temporary accommodation so that residents are more dispersed. It was explained that following the outbreak of the pandemic, Welsh Government required all Local Authorities to accommodate anyone who was homeless at the time; there were issues around this as the Council did not have enough buildings to accommodate the amount of people who were homeless and the NHS were utilising a lot of local hotels for those working on the front line. It was noted that the

Ambassador Hotel in Neath agreed to accommodate those who needed a place to stay, and had been doing this since this legislation was introduced; Housing Options continued to lobby Welsh Government for funding in order to provide other accommodations options;

- To develop and implement a robust Communications Plan to spread positive messages about the town, but also to promote reporting mechanisms;
- To resume engagement events, as soon as Covid restrictions allowed, to ensure a presence in the town, allow residents and businesses an appropriate place to share their concerns and to act as a deterrent to those at the centre of the issues. It was noted that a large part of the work of the Community Safety Team was going out and engaging with the public; the Team noticed a huge loss from not being able to do this due to the pandemic;
- To revamp and extend the existing Business Crime Reduction Partnership (BCRP) to look at further exclusions for prolific offenders, and increased support for traders. It was stated that in these meetings, the panel members will look at the prolific offenders and their offences and decide whether to exclude people from individual premises; with the help of the Police and Local Members, this effective tool could be promoted further.

Members were informed that by January 2021 the group decided to meet less frequently, as issues had subsided, however work was continuing behind the scenes; following this, two isolated incidents then occurred in the town, both confirmed to be unrelated to the Ambassador, which had much social media attention and took the work of the group back a considerable amount. Officers highlighted that the public perception of the town worsened at this time and the group decided to increase the frequency of the meetings, in which initial actions were revisited and longer term actions brought forward, where possible. It was noted that South Wales Police then decided to launch Operation Lileum in March 2021 to help with the issues at hand, and was still currently on-going.

It was mentioned that in the week leading up to the meeting of Community Safety and Public Protection Scrutiny Sub Committee, there had been another ASB incident within Neath Town Centre, which again gained a lot of social media attention; the following

information in relation to the current position, was slightly out of context due to this third incident.

In terms of the current position, Officers had received reports from traders and residents of a marked improvement over the past two months and confirmed there was increased Police presence. Members were informed that Operation Lileum saw an increase in reports through to the right channels, which was made up of Police logging incidents whilst patrolling the town centre and through regular encouragement of businesses and residents to report their concerns; reports were gradually decreasing. It was noted that traders in particular, were reporting an improved 'feel' to the town in recent weeks, both to Police and Council staff; and the membership of the BCRP was increasing, with revised promotional literature and regular visits to traders

The following points were discussed as the next steps for the Council and its partners in trying to resolve the issues with ASB:

- Operation Lileum will continue, with added strands, to ensure opportunities for support were being explored before further action was taken;
- SWP and Housing Options will continue to meet to discuss those of most concern. The Manager of the Housing Options Service had confirmed there were 31 residents in the Ambassador Hotel currently, which was significantly less than what it previously had been;
- BCRP and Licensing was exploring whether it was possible to make it a requirement for licensed premises to sign up to the BCRP scheme, if appropriate;
- The Comms Plan implementation will continue and will launch #NeathTogether webpage in which residents and traders can access to see the latest developments on the work being undertaken and it would be another platform for Officers to keep in touch with the public;
- Regular/weekly briefings will continue between Officers and appropriate Councillors;
- The Regeneration work of the town will continue;
- Community Safety engagement events had resumed and will continue, Covid restrictions permitting;
- Welsh Government will continue reviewing changes to homelessness legislation that was implemented at the start of the pandemic;

- The outreach support will continue for those accessing help from WCADA and the Salvation Army;
- With increased businesses signing up to the BCRP, Neath Town Centre could become an 'Exclusion Zone' with a 'zero tolerance' to ASB; the more businesses in the scheme, the more effective it will become.

The South Wales Police Inspector for the Neath Neighbourhood Team provided the Committee with details on the recorded crimes within the wards linked to Neath Town Centre; this detail included statistics from the past six months and comparing it to data from the past five years.

It was highlighted that for the first six months of 2021, the recorded crime rate in Neath was at its lowest when looking back at the same periods from the past five years. Members were informed that the majority of crime types showed a reduction in crime; there was an increase in possession of drugs, however this meant that there was an increase in proactivity within the Ward and therefore the increase in this crime type did not cause a concern.

In regards to ASB, it was stated that there was a marginal increase compared to previous years; however this data took into account Covid related incidents, which had been prevalent over the past year, and when these incidents were removed from the data, there was a decrease in ASB for the same period compared to previous years. As the data did not show a considerable increase of ASB in the town centre, it was mentioned that the cause for concern could be related to negative perception of the town or there could be issues with witnesses not reporting incidents.

Further information in relation to Operation Lileum was provided; it launched at the beginning of April 2021 and since then, there had been dedicated resources in the town every day of the week. It was noted that the resource would either be Police Community Support Officers (PCSOs), Police Officers or a combination of the both; due to limited resources, the town centre wasn't able to be patrolled 24/7, however Police were looking at the patterns of previous incidents and trying to apply the resource at the right times. The Committee was assured that this resource in the town centre would continue going forward.

In addition, further funding had been achieved to obtain additional resources in the town, as on occasion the Police have had to

supplement resources from other Wards; force resources had also been utilised including the mounted section and Operation Sceptre had been working in a plain clothes operation which had been very successful, particularly with seizing drugs and weapons. It was confirmed that these resources would also continue to be utilised going forward.

Members were informed that 99 ASB referrals had been submitted since Operation Lileum had commenced, and those identified as prolific offenders had been issued Community Protection Warnings which placed conditions on them; these warnings had been a successful tool. It was stated that only one individual had moved beyond that point in the process to receive a Community Protection Notice and had been arrested a number of times for being in breach of that Notice; Police were now looking into a Criminal Behaviour Order for that individual. It was added that Police were identifying and targeting the main perpetrators and putting the appropriate measures in place to try and mitigate their behaviour; 48 individuals had been arrested and there had been a number of other outcomes including alcohol seizures.

It was stated that the issues that Police were seeing in Neath Town Centre, were mirrored elsewhere in similar towns across South Wales; SWP had been working closely with other agencies to address ongoing issues. It was highlighted that a lot of effort had been targeted towards trying to get people to report incidents, as social media was currently being used a lot to share videos of incidents etc. and this wasn't one of the formal ways to report incidents. It was confirmed that in recent weeks, SWP had circulated information to the public in relation to the different ways of contacting the Police to report incidents; this needed to be increased in order to obtain a clear picture across Neath and to ensure the incidents being witnessed by the public were being brought to Police attention.

In the upcoming weeks, it was mentioned that SWP were putting in a bid (jointly with the Local Authority) to the Home Office for the Safer Streets round three funding application, in order to improve the safety within the town centres of Neath and Port Talbot.

The Committee was updated on the following points in relation to substance misuse, as this work linked closely with ASB:

- During the pandemic, the Area Planning Board (APB) commissioned organisations such as WACADA to complete more outreach work to try and better engage with people and to

help people into services quicker, in order for them to get the help they needed. This had been effective and something that was hoped to continue;

- A further review was being undertaken on how people can access services, as Officers were aware that sometimes this wasn't easy for individuals. This work was hoped to be finalised by the autumn period;
- The Police and Crime Commissioner's Office had been successful in obtaining additional funding around substance misuse and diversionary activities;
- The APB recently appointed a consultant to begin work on the major transformation project which was focused on people who had substance misuse issues, getting the help and support they needed.

Members asked how many homeless people were currently being accommodated at the Ambassador Hotel and were they all local to Neath Port Talbot. It was confirmed that there were 31 people, as of present, accommodated at the hotel; the maximum capacity was over 40. Officers stated that the homelessness legislation that was introduced at the start of the pandemic, only required Local Authorities to accommodate those who had a local connection to the area; therefore only people who were from the area or had family connections in Neath Port Talbot were accommodated. It was mentioned that there were some exemptions to this, for example someone who was fleeing domestic violence as there would be a duty to ensure their safety.

The Committee was informed that the Community Safety Team worked closely with Housing Options, who offered their service to accommodate a number of different groups of people including those who had lost their jobs, those who have had relationships break down, as well as those who were homeless; there had been some real success stories, in which individuals had received the help and support they needed and gone on to secure a tenancy, providing them with new opportunities.

A discussion took place in relation to public perception and issues with reporting; there was a need for further work to be completed around the communication aspect of this in order to make the public feel confident to report issues and to provide them with a better understanding of the reporting process. It was suggested that it would be useful to inform those who report issues of the incident progress,

for example what the outcome was. Officers mentioned that they could also put out more general information to the public, for example what happens when someone contacts 101; Officers had conversations regularly about the public feedback and comments that had been received, which helped them with their work.

It was highlighted that there had been many different Police operations that had taken place over the years, however it was evident that there was a need for a long term sustainable solution for the issues around ASB in order to prevent/reduce the incidents. Officers explained that this was part of the wider plan, working jointly with the various agencies; the Chief Executive had shown a key interest in this matter and had set all partners the challenge of looking at more sustainable long term solutions. It was added that everyone had a shared responsibility in helping to tackle these issues and it was important to try and find the right balance; dealing with the present issues at hand, giving thought to the long term solutions and being mindful that there had been cuts to services which had a significant impact on what could be achieved. Officers confirmed that they would continue to apply for funding and lobby Welsh Government for additional monies.

Officers were asked if there was sufficient resources and work being carried out in Port Talbot Town Centre to try and tackle the ASB issues. Members were reassured that Officers were carrying out work in relation to ASB across the whole of the County Borough and were very much aware of the problems across the whole of Neath Port Talbot; there were various strands of work ongoing in all areas and there were a number of in-house operations being carried out to target some of the problems. It was highlighted that the Deputy Leader, ASB Officer and Business Crime Officer recently visited Port Talbot Town Centre to speak to businesses about ASB. Members were informed that the Police do not take any proactive resources from one town centre, to use in the other; there were set resources for each.

In relation to the previously mentioned 'Exclusion Zone' with a 'zero tolerance' to ASB which could be achieved by businesses signing up to the BCRP, it was asked if there were plans to extend this to Port Talbot Town Centre. Officers stated that any approach that was taken in Neath Town Centre, would have been a tried and tested approach that could be utilised in various other locations; the Business Crime Officer was regularly visiting Port Talbot Town Centre to promote the

BCRP and its benefits, and try to encourage businesses to sign up to it.

It was asked if there were any barriers in signing up to the BCRP scheme. Officers confirmed that there was a cost to the scheme, however there were a number of different options for businesses to choose from. Officers were aware that the County Borough had a lot of small, independent traders in all of its town centres and want to ensure that something that was accessible to the bigger traders, was just as accessible for the smaller traders. It was mentioned that the BCRP was part of a much wider, national network and there were schemes right across the Country in England and Wales; Officers were keen to learn from being part of that network, how others were dealing with this. Traders would be encourage to inform Officers of any barriers that were preventing them from signing up, as there could be solutions and/or modifications to the scheme.

Members queried whether there were ASB stats available for all Wards from the previous few months and if these stats could be circulated to Members. Officers explained that they received quarterly reports for all stats which were brought to the Community Safety Partnership Board. It was agreed that the ASB stats would be shared with Members, however keeping in mind that the stats weren't necessarily reflective of the true scale of the problem as the issue of under reporting was a huge issue across the board.

A discussion took place around the main ASB crimes, that the Police were aware of, that were taking place in Neath Town Centre; when looking at the issues reported on an average week, the crimes that were reported included shoplifting, fighting and individuals under the influence causing ASB. It was mentioned that on occasion ASB incidents escalated into low level disturbance on the streets. In relation to County Lines, it was stated that the incidents were low; Police were continuing to work to ensure County Lines were kept at bay within the area.

Members asked if it was the same group of people who were committing ASB crimes and if there were sufficient powers to tackle these issues. Officers highlighted that not all incidents were related to those staying at the Ambassador Hotel; the Police had confirmed that the individuals involved in some of the higher profile incidents were not known to the Housing Options Service. It was explained that the 99 referrals that were previously mentioned, weren't 99 different individuals but instead the total number of referrals, some of which

could have been repeat referrals; the Police were able to identify repeat offenders from the referrals and those who had been given Community Protection Warnings, Community Protection Notices and Criminal Behaviour Orders. It was added that there were sometimes individuals within the town who were not presenting themselves appropriately, however not necessarily committing any offences; it was important to police these proportionately.

Officers were asked if 'Stop and Search' was effective, to which it was confirmed that it was; there had been arrested in the past few weeks from the Police using this mechanism. Members were informed that Operation Sceptre were very effective with this and identifying individuals with drugs.

It was queried whether it would be beneficial to accommodate the homeless in a building similar to the L and A Centre in Goytre, Port Talbot as this was situated in a rural area. Officers explained to the Committee that the Housing Options Service struggled to get local hotels and accommodation provisions to engage with them; as it stood, the only option for accommodating homeless people was in the Ambassador Hotel in Neath and the L and A Centre in Port Talbot. It was added that until Welsh Government changed their directive on accommodating people, those services were likely to remain. Members were informed that the L and A centre had its own series of issues and similar to those taking place in Neath Town Centre, as well as having limited space; in the coming weeks the Community Safety Team planned to engage with the residents around this area and talk to them about crime prevention and reporting ASB. There was a need to continue to liaise with Welsh Government about changes to their homelessness legislation and explain pressures that it had on Local Authorities to provide accommodation when the options were limited; normally there would be other accommodation available, such as Bed and Breakfast venues in Swansea, however since the legislation was introduced, all County Boroughs in Wales were subject to it and found their own pressures.

Members stated that the narrative of this type of work needed to be changed in order for the public to have a clear understanding of the challenges the Council and its partners faced and why these challenges were prevalent; reference was made to the numerous cuts to services and how this had impacted the work.

It was important to note that when discussing changing public perception, Officers were not trying to portray that there weren't any ASB issues, instead they were keen to highlight to the public the various work streams that were being carried out in order to tackle the issues at hand; occasionally the public perception was that the Council was not doing anything to try and prevent these issues from occurring. It was added that it was also important to ensure that factual information was being communicated to the public to prevent hearsay. In order to try and settle public perception and the various hearsay that had been circulating around recent incidents, an Officer within the Community Safety Team monitored their Facebook page for comments and provided appropriate responses; the immediate response to the comments was vital in order to prevent speculation and to alleviate concerns.

The Committee was informed that there was a need to manage expectations of the public when they called the South Wales Police 101 service. The South Wales Police Inspector for the Neath Neighbourhood Team explained the process of how various calls would be dealt with, some elements in the process included risk assessments and referrals to the Incident Resolution Team; the Police had recently put out media around this matter and expressed that if the call is logged and valid, it would provide them with a picture of the reported incident which would help to apply the relevant resources.

Reference was made to the partnership meetings that was previously mentioned. It was noted that partnership working and communication was very important in this work. Officers were asked if the Chair and Vice Chair of the Community Safety and Public Protection Scrutiny Sub Committee could be included in these meetings. It was stated that the Chair and Vice Chair could be involved, however the governance around this would need to be checked with the Head of Legal and Democratic Services.

In regards to reporting incidents through to the 101 telephone system, it was noted that residents had found this system challenging as they weren't always able to get through to an operator and lacked confidence in the system itself. Officers stated that there were other mechanisms in place to report incidents, including online and QR codes; there was a need to keep pushing this message out to the public to promote all options. It was mentioned that 101 was a non-emergency line therefore it did not require an emergency response; if it was, calling 999 would prompt an emergency response. Members

were informed that information around this had been promoted on social media this past week to inform the public of the multitude of ways to report incidents; Officers would also be circulating this information to Members.

Members expressed their concerns in relation to the lack of resources that were available across the board to deal with the ongoing ASB issues, and highlighted that obtaining more resources was vital in the process of tackling the issues. An incident was raised in which a 999 emergency call took significant time for Police to arrive on the scene which was another concern of Members. It was stated that the local Police had been granted five additional Police Officers as a result of reviews conducted on supply and demand; the Police were recruiting heavily at this moment in time, and hoped that the extra resource will strengthen the local resilience. In regards to Police taking time to arrive at an incident, it was highlighted that this was not the 'norm' and generally there would be a far shorter attendance time from a local resource; however, there were occasions where there would be delays if the resource was elsewhere.

A discussion took place in relation to CCTV. Members highlighted that if more cameras were in place, they could be useful tool to prosecute perpetrators. It was noted that there was a significant roll out of new CCTV technology that was underway; currently the tendering process was ongoing. Officers added that this would include brand new technology, improve contacts with the Police and the cameras will have better imagery.

It was mentioned that Public Space Protection Orders (PSPOs) could help deal with the ongoing issues of ASB in the town centre. Officers confirmed that the use of PSPOs had been discussed when thinking about what options and mechanisms could be put in place to try and help reduce the issues; however, there was a lot of misconceptions around their effectiveness. It was highlighted that if a PSPO was in place signage would need to be installed in the particular area, stating what acts were prohibited; there would need to be resource in this area to ensure the PSPO was being adhered to, however resources were currently limited. It was mentioned that the Police wouldn't be the prosecuting agency if PSPOs were instigated, instead it would be the responsibility of the Local Authority. The Committee was informed that another concern with PSPOs was that they tend to displace the problem as they will solve the problem in one particular place, however create one elsewhere. It was added that they could also be a deterrent for other people and businesses wanting to come

into the town centre. Officers confirmed that they will continue to explore all the possible options, however it was vital to consider the pros, cons and effectiveness of the various tools that could be utilised. It was agreed that the Principal Officer for Community Safety will prepare a briefing note for members on the usage of PSPOs.

The Officers and Police colleagues were thanked for their presentation and their continued hard work with this matter.

3. **Forward Work Programme 2021/22**

Members asked if the following item could be moved forward to an earlier date:

- Update on Anti-Social Behaviour in general (all town centres and wider)

It was agreed that the Democratic Services Officer would liaise with the Chair and Officers to identify an additional date for the Committee to meet to discuss this item.

The Committee decided that the following items be included in the Forward Work Programme:

- Update on the work ongoing with the APB around substance misuse and the harm reduction work that was happening locally;
- Update on the ADDER project and funding. It was mentioned that the Police and Crime Commissioners Office were leading on this project, therefore the relevant contact should be invited to present.

Members noted the Community Safety and Public Protection Scrutiny Sub Committee Forward Work Programme for 2021/22.

CHAIRPERSON

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