

Climate Change, Housing and Communities Scrutiny Panel

Minutes - 22 February 2024

Attendance

Members of the Climate Change, Housing and Communities Scrutiny Panel

Cllr Mary Bateman
Cllr Greg Brackenridge
Cllr Wendy Dalton (Vice-Chair)
Cllr Sally Green
Cllr Stephanie Haynes
Cllr Barbara McGarrity QN
Cllr Anwen Muston (Chair)

Cllr Jennifer Cockayne - substitute
Cllr Phil Bateman - substitute

Witnesses

Wolverhampton Homes

Angela Barnes, Director - Homes &
Communities
Stephen Perry, Rachel Fanthom, and Pardip
Nagra - ASB Team Leaders

West Midlands Police

Chief Inspector Kelly Monaghan

West Midlands Police and Crime Commissioner

Simon Foster

Employees

Earl Piggott-Smith
John Roseblade
Lynsey Kelly
Hannah Pawley
John Roseblade
John Denley
Steve Woodward
Claire Walters

Scrutiny Officer
Director of Resident Services
Head of Communities
Community Safety Manager
Director of Resident Services
Director of Public Health
Head of Environmental Services
Environmental Place Based Development
Manager
Chief Operating Officer

David Pattison

Part 1 – items open to the press and public

Item No. *Title*

- 1 **Welcome and Introductions**
Cllr Anwen Muston, Chair, welcomed everyone to the meeting and advised it was also being live streamed to the press and public.

- 2 **Meeting procedures to be followed**
The Chair explained the process to be followed during the meeting for asking questions.

- 3 **Apologies**
Apologies were received from the following members of the panel:

Cllr John Reynolds
Cllr Rohit Mistry
Cllr Andrew McNeill
Cllr Linda Leach – Substitute Cllr Jennifer Cockayne
Cllr Jacqueline Sweetman – Substitute Cllr Phil Bateman

- 4 **Declarations of interest**
There were no declarations of interest recorded.

- 5 **Minutes of the previous meeting (16 November 2023)**
That the minutes of the meeting held on 16 November 2023 be approved as a correct record.

- 6 **Safer Wolverhampton Partnership and Community Safety response to Anti-Social Behaviour Complaints**
The Chair invited Lynsey Kelly, Head of Communities, to introduce the presentation.

The Head of Communities advised the panel that it would be joint presentation with colleagues from each of the organisations in attendance contributing on their respective areas of work. The presentation gave an overview of the collective approach used to address anti-social behaviour (ASB) issues in Wolverhampton.

The running order of presenters were as follows:
 1. Slides 1 -10 - Community Safety - Lynsey Kelly
 2. Slides 11 - 16 - Wolverhampton Homes ASB Team - Angela Barnes, Director - Homes & Communities, Stephen Perry, ASB Team Leader, Rachel Fanthom, ASB Team Leader, Pardip Nagra, ASB Team Leader
 3. Slides 17 - 19 - Public Protection Team – Steve Woodward, Head of Environmental Services and Claire Walters, Environmental Place Based Development Manager
 4. Slides 20 - 23 – West Midlands Police - Chief Inspector Kelly Monaghan
 5. Slides 24 - 26 - Community Safety - Hannah Pawley, Community Safety Manager
 6. Simon Foster – West Midlands Police and Crime Commissioner presentation

The Head of Communities added that at the end of the presentations panel members would have the opportunity to ask questions about the role of different organisations working in partnership to respond to issues of ASB.

Hannah Pawley, Community Safety Manager, outlined the key questions for panel members to consider, for example, how can we increase understanding of appropriate reporting of ASB?

A copy of the presentation is available.

The Chair invited panel members to comment on the presentations.

A panel member asked representatives from Wolverhampton Homes if it was possible to provide a breakdown of the source of ASB reports between tenants of Wolverhampton Homes and those from private tenants or other housing providers as the slide on performance indicators does not specify this.

Angela Barnes, Director - Homes & Communities, confirmed that ASB information on types of type of tenure and ASB reports can be provided.

The Director advised the panel that the information has only recently started to be collected on other tenancy types.

A panel member asked representatives from Wolverhampton Homes asked if was possible to report a ASB issue anonymously, particularly in situations involving people who may be vulnerable and being exploited.

Stephen Perry, ASB Team Leader, confirmed that reports can be made anonymously through different communication methods. The ASB Leader added that if the matter was referred to Court that then the issue may not meet the legal threshold for evidence, but Wolverhampton Homes will collate the information and consider taking action. This decision would depend on the severity of the case and the level of risk and other third-party information. The ASB Teams Leader commented that it is also possible for information to be redacted.

The ASB Team Leader advised that Councillors when speaking to someone about a ASB complaint they ask the person making the report for their contact details. This information will help the service to contact the person to discuss the issue further. The ASB Team Leader reassured the panel that the information would be treated confidentially and kept secure. The service is bound by the Data Protection Act and GDPR about the use of personal and confidential data.

A panel asked for clarification about the use of hotspot letter or warning letters in response to a noise complaint and if other neighbours would be contacted to see if they have any complaints.

Steve Perry, ASB Team Leader advised the panel that Wolverhampton Homes would treat each case on its merits. In some situations, involving noise complaints it will be possible to identify the property through the concierge services or when colleagues from the ASB team are in the area. The ASB Team leader added that the review of previous complaints would be checked to see if there is a history of complaints which may help identify the property. If it is not possible to identify the property by checking property above and below in the block, then it may be necessary to expand the search and contact other tenants.

A panel member queried the number of parental control agreements and Acceptable Behaviour Contracts that have been issued and how effective they are in achieving their aim of changing people's behaviour.

Pardip Nagra, ASB Team Leader, advised the panel that information can be provided from the case management system and will be shared. The ASB Team Leader commented that in terms of the effectiveness of this non-legal action it can be effective where parents are willing to engage. However, there is acceptance that such action could benefit from being strengthened in situations where parents do not want to engage. If legal action is being taken then the attempts to find a solution using parental agreements can be helpful to evidence in Court for example, that Wolverhampton Homes has tried other options before making this decision if challenged in Court, where evidence of a breach on a non-legal action can be presented.

A panel member asked for further details about how ASB issues relating to a private residence are dealt with and action that could be taken. The panel member also asked the Police and Crime Commissioner what performance data can be shared about the impact of initiatives such as Operation Eternity referred to in the presentation. The panel member also expressed concern about the police response to local businesses offering CCTV of ASB and the overall lack of response and welcomed a comment from the police representative.

Rachel Fanthom, ASB Team Leader, advised the panel in relation to a noise complaint about a private address then this would be referred to the Council's Public Protection Team who have responsibility for responding to ASB complaints. The ASB Team confirmed that the Council does not have same powers for tenants when dealing with private tenants or owner occupiers.

The ASB Team leader added that there is an option to consider a premises closure order and the service will discuss the issue with the police and others. The service will also liaise with the landlord if it relates to private property. The first contact would be made with the tenant or resident to try and resolve the issue.

The Police and Crime Commissioner confirmed that Home Office require specific performance data to be collected which is regularly reported on as part of the financial agreement. The performance data is also presented to members of Community Safety Partnership. The Police and Crime Commissioner confirmed that the performance information is available, and arrangements will be made for it to be shared with the panel.

Chief Inspector Kelly Monaghan added that ASB incidents involving shops would be treated as crime and dealt with as such. The Chief Inspector acknowledged the concerns of businesses and nuisance at night time but such incidents are considered to be a low level crime priority. The Chief Inspector commented in response to the view that the police are not interested in dealing with incidents involving local business and reassured the panel the current approach is to investigate where there are any identifiable lines of inquiry. The Chief Inspector confirmed that the police will collect CCTV footage if available and follow up.

The Chair invited David Pattison, Chief Operating Officer, to provide some clarification on the comments made by the WM Police and Crime Commissioner in relation to Operation Hercules which relates to the issue of illegal street racing. The Chief Operating Officer advised the panel that the Council along with nine other local authorities took a case all the way to the Supreme Court to ensure the existing street racing injunction could continue.

The Chief Operating Officer advised the panel that the application from the local authorities represented was successful. The Supreme Court confirmed on the 29 November 2023 that the Council has the power to continue to use injunctions to take action to deal with a really challenging issue, which has led to a death in the past. The Chief Operating Officer added that it is important to provide some clarification that the Council along with other Councils took the issue to the Supreme Court.

The Chair thanked the Chief Operating Officer for the excellent news and also congratulated the support from other Councils represented in supporting this work.

A panel member expressed concern and frustration with the service from the police when reporting incidents of ASB and highlighted the lack of response to emails sent and highlighted the contrast in response to a previous question about the change in policy to collect CCTV evidence from local shops. The panel member added that the lack of response undermined public confidence as not able to evidence that Councillors have acted on their concerns. The issue about the lack of response to reports has been repeatedly raised but the situation has not improved. The panel member expressed concern about the lack of contact details, key priorities on the WM Police website.

The Chair invited the Chief Inspector to respond and the Director of Public Health, in role of Vice Chair of Safer Wolverhampton Partnership, to also comment on the points raised.

The Chief Inspector expressed disappointment in the comments made about the service and apologised for not responding to issues reported to the police. The Chief Inspector suggested that it would be helpful to get more details about who the Councillor was trying to contact and agreed to follow up on the issue and report back. The Chief Inspector commented that the lack of response to an email does not necessarily mean that the police are not responding to reports or acting on the information. The Chief Inspector welcomed the feedback and added that she was not able to comment further without more specific details about the issues highlighted.

The Chair invited the Director of Public Health to respond on behalf of the Safer Wolverhampton Partnership Board. The Director of Public Health commented on the need for the partnership to recognise the limited value in saying that things are working effectively, when this does not reflect the experiences of the public. The Director added that it was important to reflect on this when reviewing the priorities in the Safer Wolverhampton Partnership plan. The Director commented on the feedback from public consultation and how this has informed the development of the priorities. The Director commented on the consider the issues that matter to local people during the consultation and checking to make sure they are also representative of the views of the city. The Director highlighted the increase in the number of survey responses as sign of progress since 2018.

The Director commented that the overall strength of the partnership is only as good as its constituent members and highlighted the need for partners to work together and having honest conversations about different perceptions about its performance. The Director commented on the need for the partnership to have a shared goal and being able to discuss the goal and if necessary, accept the need to improve performance to respond to the priorities or the concerns from the public.

The Director commented on difference in perceptions between the public and the partnership board about how they feel issue of safety within their communities and queried if there was a clear link between them. The Director commented on the work being done to improve public engagement and highlighted the launch of Love Your Communities and good evidence of emerging of change and increased multi-agency involvement.

The pre-meetings with local Councillors at Love Your Communities meetings provide the opportunity ask them what the local issues are and responding to them. The level of attendance at these meetings will give an indication of progress and provide the opportunity to get helpful feedback and challenge from the public.

The Director commented that members of the partnership will hold each other to account in a way that is responsive to the needs of local people in terms of how services combine or deliver selected resources.

The Director commented on references in the presentation to taking a public health approach and advised that this not new and is about having financial stability and having a clear policy direction over a period. The Director added that one year funding schemes does not create the consistency needed to have the required impact and highlighted the need to think about how the partnership can work collectively together to manage risk at the national and local levels and be more creative about how the funds can be used to best effect.

A panel member repeated their dissatisfaction about the lack of response to emails from police and frustration that no acknowledgement was issued as there was no way to confirm to the public that the message has been received and acted upon.

The Chief Inspector responded that if a confirmation of receipt was required that this could be done and reassured the panel that if a message has been sent to a police email address that Cllrs should be confident that it has been received and being dealt with.

A panel member commented that while acknowledging improvements in dealing with ASB complaints over the past 20 years, that the comment about the response to emails was unacceptable and shared similar frustrations about the lack of response to emails sent to the police. The panel insisted that it was important there was a response to an email.

A panel member asked for update on earlier presentation about the possibility of extending the use of new CCTV cameras primarily to tackle fly tipping to also cover incidents of ASB.

John Roseblade, Director of Resident Services, advised the panel that following the panel meeting where the issue was discussed the matter was discussed a later meeting with Chief Superintendent Richard Fisher.

The Director confirmed that following this meeting it was confirmed that there was the potential to take it forward. The discussions are still at an early stage. The Director agreed to update the panel on progress with possible timelines about the extending the use of cameras at a future meeting. The panel member queried the timeline for installation of new CCTV cameras.

Claire Walters, Environmental Place Based Development Manager, advised the panel that the proposal is going through the procurement process and the plan is that cameras will be installed in the two to three months when this stage has been completed.

The panel member queried the work being done to engage with the public about how to report incidents of ASB and specifically for people who may lack IT skills or have access to the equipment. The panel member suggested that an awareness publicity campaign would be helpful.

Angela Barnes, Director - Homes & Communities, advised the panel of the different methods for reporting ASB and the use of digital method is promoted and encouraged. This method of reporting would help ensure the service has all the information needed to start an investigation. The Director explained the range of community communication methods which is promoted and added that the service also receives reports from Councillors and other third parties. The service also works with Residents Associations. The Director commented on progress in capturing the customer service experience through the newly established Customer Involvement Panel which has been set up to engage with residents. In addition, there are plans to involve leaseholders in the work of the panel.

The Director advised the panel of other methods of reporting ASB incidents, for example, directly to Wolverhampton Homes or by tenancy officers when on site who can also record complaints from the public. The Director added that evidence from tenant surveys show high levels of satisfaction with service response to ASB issues, but acknowledged the perception of how the service deals with ASB is low. The results were similar to those of other housing providers.

The Director commented on the issue raised by the panel about the need to give reassurance to the public when reporting issues of ASB and accepted that the service might also not be seen as being proactive. The future work of the service will be looking at what can be done to address the issue and offer reassurance when a report is made.

A panel member raised a concern about the members of the public reporting issues of ASB direct to their Councillors because they don't know who to report it to. The panel member highlighted impact of increased workload and additional stress on Councillors in trying to resolve issues on behalf of Wolverhampton Homes. The panel member commented on the need to provide an alternative to online methods and the promotion of these methods as Councillors should not be seen to be the first point of contact when the public want to report an issue of ASB.

A panel member offered congratulations on the work done in Ashmore Park area by the organisation EYES who provide youth work patrols. The panel member highlighted the important work done by the organisations since October 2023 to engage with young people every night and positive impact it has had.

A panel member queried if there were any plans on providing local community facilities and support in other areas of the City as an alternative to people having to travel to the Civic Centre to report housing matters.

The Director of Public Health advised the panel that the Council has engaged with Councillors and with young people to find out what kind of provision they would like to see in these areas.

The Director of Resident Services agreed to look at the possibility of developing other community hubs in response to the concern raised and would investigate and report back to future meeting.

A panel member congratulated the services on the presentation and the range of work being done to respond to ASB reports from residents. The member highlighted the perception following a review of case work that Wolverhampton Homes is known predominantly as a housing provider and the issue can only reported to them where it involves their tenant, but not clear what happens when the case involves a private tenant or owner.

Angela Barnes, Director - Homes & Communities, accepted the point about the public perception about the issue of tenure and suggested that a breakdown by tenure type information requested earlier would provide the service with a better understanding of the issue. The Director added that the service has been collecting data for about six months and will be able to investigate this.

The Director commented that in reference to the point about raising public awareness about the process for reporting incidents of ASB that the planned work will make sure the public understand the process for reporting incidents. The Director added that based on reports that there is strong evidence that the public know how to report incidents of ASB. The Director advised the panel that service is available to anyone to report but agreed to look at how the offer is advertised to make this clearer.

Rachel Fanthom, ASB Team Leader, added that the service explains at Love Your Community meetings that the service is available to anyone to report incidents of ASB and explained that there is a dedicated ASB reporting line that goes through the City Direct. The ASB Team Leader advised that reports to this number would be referred to the team in the first instance and then depending on the issue would refer it to the most appropriate partner agency to respond.

The Chair thanked the presenters for their contributions and the presentation.

Resolved:

1. The panel agreed to note the work being done by different partner organisations to address issue of ASB in Wolverhampton.
2. The panel comments on the presentation to be noted.
3. The panel requests for further information and progress on actions to be shared with the panel when available.