

SAFER SELECT COMMITTEE

MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON MONDAY, 20 SEPTEMBER 2010

Councillors Present: Jeff Beck, George Chandler, Roger Hunneman (Vice-Chairman), Robert Morgan (Substitute) (In place of Keith Woodhams) and Quentin Webb (Chairman)

Also Present: Rachel Craggs (Community Safety Manager) and Alex O'Connor (Assistant Community Safety Officer), Councillor Paul Bryant, David Lowe (Scrutiny and Partnerships Manager, in place of Andy Day who sent apologies), Supt Robin Rickard (Thames Valley Police) and Elaine Walker (Principal Policy Officer)

Apologies for inability to attend the meeting: Councillor Keith Woodhams

Councillor(s) Absent: Councillor Adrian Edwards

PART I

9. Minutes

The Minutes of the meeting held on 5th July 2010 were approved as a true and correct record and signed by the Chairman.

10. Declarations of Interest

Councillor Bryant declared an interest in Agenda Item 5, but reported that, as his interest was not prejudicial, he determined to remain to take part in the debate.

11. Matters Arising

The Committee reviewed the status of activities identified at previous meetings. The Committee was content with progress but requested that item two remain until resolved.

RESOLVED that item two in Matters Arising remain until resolved.

12. Installation of Fire Sprinklers

(Councillor Bryant declared a personal interest in Agenda item 5 by virtue of the fact that he was the Chairman of the Royal Berkshire Fire Authority, appointed to represent the Council on this outside body. As his interest was personal and not prejudicial he was permitted to take part in the debate).

(Councillor Chandler joined the meeting at 6:45pm)

The Chairman expressed thanks for two visits made by the Committee to the Kennet Centre and Sainsbury's to view their automatic fire suppression systems (fire sprinkler systems). The members of the Committee agreed that they would still like to visit a school where an automatic fire suppression system had been installed, and requested that this be taken forward.

The Chairman summarised previous discussions of the Committee in a series of recommendations for the Committee to approve. Following discussion, the Committee agreed the following:

- The Committee recognised that building regulations were robust and suitable for the evacuation of buildings and protection of occupants;

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- The Committee recognised the protection offered to both the fabric of buildings and their occupants by automatic fire suppression systems;
- The Committee accepted that the cost of retrospectively fitting automatic fire suppression systems would be prohibitive except in some cases of substantial refurbishment;
- The Committee concluded that the installation of automatic fire suppression systems in any newly built Council owned or contracted properties should be presumed, and requested that a policy be drafted for approval;
- The Committee was informed of the significant savings in insurance premiums achieved by other local authorities as a result of installing automatic fire suppression systems, and recommended that further discussion be held with the Council's property insurers in order to achieve similar savings.
- The Committee considered that the benefits of installing automatic fire suppression systems included a greater flexibility in building design and a reduction in water damage caused when the fire was being extinguished.
- The Committee was grateful to David Sharp of the Royal Berkshire Fire and Rescue Service for the information supplied to the meeting of the 5th July 2010.
- The Committee considered that whilst installation and maintenance costs were a prime concern, they had to be considered in relation to savings in other areas including savings achieved through alternative building design.
- The Committee recommended that consideration be given early in the design stages of a project as to where the components of an automatic fire suppression system would be located in order to reduce installation costs.

Councillor Bryant suggested to the Committee that any assessment of the need for automatic fire suppression systems in a building should reflect the specific issues relating to the use of the building. For example, a school would have strong procedures for, and the ability to, evacuate the building; whereas residents of a residential home would be less able to evacuate the area.

The Committee considered a further suggestion that the Council insist on the installation of an automatic fire suppression system in all suitable planning applications submitted to the Council. The Committee considered that without national backing, this could not be implemented and so would not be recommended.

RESOLVED that:

- A visit to a school where an automatic fire suppression system has been installed be arranged.
- The Committee would make the following recommendations to the Overview and Scrutiny Management Commission for endorsement:
 1. That the installation of automatic fire suppression systems in any newly built Council owned or contracted properties should be presumed, and request that a policy to this effect be drafted for approval. The policy should reflect the views of the Committee as noted above.
 2. That further discussion be held with the Council's property insurers with the aim of achieving further savings in premiums.

13. Crime Statistics

The Committee received a presentation by Superintendent Robin Rickard (Thames Valley Police), Rachel Craggs (Community Safety Manager) and Alex O'Connor (Assistant Community Safety Officer) concerning crime statistics and the strategic assessment process.

Following questioning, the following points were clarified:

- The strategic assessment process was an annual assessment of crime, anti-social behaviour and substance misuse trends which resulted in the identification of annual priorities. Corrective action would be taken between reviews if evidence indicated that it was necessary.
- Superintendent Rickard explained that the introduction of the Partnership Intelligence Monitoring and Mapping System (PIMMS) has increased the speed to which incidents could be responded, allowing the rapid movement of resources to resolve a problem or enable a longer term solution to be implemented quickly.
- The Committee was reminded that responding to crime was not limited to police activity, and that partners played a critical role in reducing crime. For example, neighbourhood wardens were able to provide reassurance through visibility; and tackling anti-social behaviour was led by the local authority and housing with the police playing only a minor role in providing evidence.
- As less focus was placed on National Indicators, the strategic assessment process was expected to become more important in order to identify and react to local problems. It was expected that nationally there would remain priority crime categories.
- It was acknowledged that there had been a recent short term spike in reported burglaries, however crime could be seen to follow a series of peaks and troughs over time and the recent figures reflected this pattern. Some changes could also be explained by the changes to national crime recording standards such as an amendment at the end of 2004 allowing arrests to be made of people committing assault with no injury, where previously this had not been possible. However, all crime had been reduced by more than 16% (951 crimes) compared to the same period in 2009 and this was also less than in 2008.
- The number of priority and prolific offenders (PPOs) was determined locally in relation to the number of people who were able to be managed. There were currently 34 people in the PPO category in West Berkshire. The PPO management scheme aimed to identify, manage and remove the motivation to offend. This might involve ensuring they had somewhere to live on leaving prison, or providing assistance to find work.
- It was confirmed that there was no significant increase in crime levels experienced during the 2010 World Cup. However Superintendent Rickard explained that preventative work had been undertaken in preparation, including licensing officer patrols during each match, and more police resources being made available with greater visibility.
- Activity around anti-social behaviour was being led by the Safer Communities Partnership, and it was likely that the Council along with the police would take the lead on this through the Safer Communities Partnership. However responsibility for reporting and addressing anti-social behaviour could not sit with a single organisation and would remain with individual organisations.

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- It was proposed that work be undertaken with schools to address the current issue of robbery committed by youths, where the motivation was bullying rather than the acquisition of particular items. There was a concern that young people were not aware of the implications arising from this (fitting the definition of, and therefore being recorded as, a robbery) and therefore possibly resulting in a sentence of several years in prison for perpetrators.

The Committee enquired whether there were local schemes, as in some other areas, aimed at empowering local people to deal effectively with confrontation or perceived hostile situations such as when faced by large groups. The Committee was informed that no schemes were available in this area, and the Committee agreed that this should be added to the work programme for review.

The Committee was informed that the future of the activities able to be undertaken around crime reduction was uncertain in the current climate. However two areas that should be pursued were the PPO scheme (now known as integrated offender management) and the need for all partners to be aware of the contribution they could make to crime reduction, such as to improving building developments in order to design out crime at the planning stage.

The Committee queried whether it would be appropriate to request comments from the police for planning applications submitted to the Council for larger developments.

It was agreed that the Committee should add to the work programme items to support the integrated offender management programme and designing out crime from the planning stage of a proposed development.

RESOLVED that:

- A review would be undertaken into the possibility of making available activities to empower local communities facing perceived hostile situations.
- The Committee would undertake a review in support of the integrated offender management programme.
- The Committee would undertake a review in support of designing out crime from the planning stage of a proposed development.

14. Work Programme

The Committee reviewed the work programme and agreed to review Gating Orders at their next meeting in December 2010. This review would consider the current position of gating orders and the suitability of the current policy.

The Committee also agreed to add three items to their work programme to review, schemes aimed to empower communities that faced perceived hostile situations; support for the integrated offender management programme; and the planning out crime at the design stage of developments.

RESOLVED that:

- The Committee would undertake a review of gating orders in December 2010.
- The Committee would add the following review items to their work programme:
 - schemes aimed to empower communities that faced perceived hostile situations;
 - support for the integrated offender management programme;
 - planning out crime at the design stage of developments

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(The meeting commenced at 6.30 pm and closed at 8.00 pm)

CHAIRMAN

Date of Signature