

**OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMISSION –
ADVISORY MEETING
7 OCTOBER 2021
6.30 - 8.30 PM**



Present:

Councillors Angell (Chair), Virgo (Vice-Chair), Mrs Birch, Brossard, Gbadebo, MJ Gibson, McLean, Mrs Mattick, Porter and Temperton

Parent Governor representative:

M Glanville

Apologies for absence were received from:

Councillors Mrs McKenzie-Boyle and Mossom

Executive Member present:

Councillor Harrison, Executive Member for Culture, Delivery and Public Protection

In attendance:

Councillor Brown

Also Present:

Timothy Wheadon, Chair of Community Safety Partnership
Superintendent Felicity Parker, Local Police Commander Bracknell & Wokingham
Alison O'Meara, Head of Community Safety

32. Minutes of previous meeting

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting of the Commission held on 9 September 2021 be approved as a correct record, and signed by the Chair.

33. Declarations of Interest and Party Whip

There were no declarations made and no indications that councillors would be participating while under the party whip.

34. Urgent Items of Business

There were no items of urgent business.

35. Public Participation

No submissions had been made by members of the public under the Council's Public Participation Scheme for Overview and Scrutiny.

36. Community Safety

Timothy Wheadon, Chair of Community Safety Partnership, Superintendent Felicity Parker, Local Police Commander Bracknell & Wokingham, Alison O'Meara, Head of Community Safety and Councillor Harrison, Executive Member for Culture, Delivery and Public Protection had been invited to attend. Meeting as the Crime and Disorder

Committee, the councillors present received a presentation on the performance of the Community Safety Partnership and the priorities in the Community Safety Plan for the coming year.

In response to the questions submitted in advance and arising from discussion it was noted:

- knife crime was observed in low numbers across Bracknell Forest but was connected to both drug crimes and domestic abuse so was associated with a wide range of age groups
- Thames Valley Police were aware of councillors concerns about speeding in the area and it was noted that police resources to actively tackle it were an issue. A task and finish group had been set up to consider the strategy for tackling the issue. A volunteer Speed Watch project was discussed and it was agreed that Councillor Mrs Birch would be interested in being a contact for this. There were certain areas that speed cameras could be located due to how they were calibrated but the intention was to make sure there was increased visibility, increased operations and stopping and seizing noisy vehicles
- it was key to increase the community's awareness of the issue as a deterrent because speeding was being perpetrated by residents as well as those travelling through the area
- that operations were focused in areas where there was a risk of injury
- the task and finish group involved highways officers to help engineer solutions
- concerns regarding lorries going through red lights at the twin bridges roundabout would be fed back
- that the legal definition of stalking was in relation to harassment where behaviour is escalating and police consider the threat, harm and risk an individual is facing. However, the Crime Prosecution Service determines which crimes to prosecute
- if a property where drugs are being smoked is an issue then this should be referred to the community safety team who could take steps with partners such as if owned by a Housing Association then they would work with them to issue warning letters and if privately owned they would contact private landlords and make them aware of the issue
- there had been over 2,000 calls reporting domestic incidents over the past year, 74 reports of rape in the area which was a slight decrease and 170 reports of sexual assault not including rape
- there was recognition that these were devastating incidents and it was sometimes difficult to gather the evidence to hold perpetrators to account
- There is support for victims by specially-trained officers who will signpost them to services and also support them in court
- the CSP encouraged reporting ASB intelligence as quickly as possible, such as gatherings being planned so that they can take action
- prevention activities included using outreach teams as well as communication campaigns, signage by fire service and police and rangers with active patrolling
- when ASB activities took place in premises there are a number of criminal and civil which could be deployed ranging from a low-level response first but could increase to community protection notices taking into consideration the vulnerability of victims
- the proposed Community Safety Fund's (from the Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner) budget reduction of £16k over a three-year period was significant but the phased reduction enabled the CSP to prepare and discuss options with partners

- **the Head of Community Safety was asked to feed back the outcome of these discussions to the Commission to understand the impact of this reduction**
- every year a public consultation was undertaken to review CSP priorities which included asking additional questions such as where local hotspots for crime and ASB are that police and other partners may not be aware of
- there was recognition that more work needed to be done to report back to the public on success stories to counter negative narratives observed on social media at times
- the focus for CSP is about preventing crime, not just responding to it
- it was noted that not everyone is arrested as there are other ways to deal with incidents e.g. out of court disposals, restorative justice or payment made for damage. This needs to be proportionate response to the crime committed
- every single victim of crime is asked how satisfied they are with how they have been dealt with by police and survey responses are considered by independent advisory groups
- it was not possible to confirm how accurate or current the data was on externally managed data sites such as police.uk
- **the Local Police Commander Bracknell & Wokingham would provide arrest rates, prosecution figures, conviction and reoffending rates to the Commission**
- in response to ASB car meets, a task and finish group had been set up to work with partners including Parks and Countryside and Highways to understand the locations and engage with the organisers to try to make them understand the impact of their events on residents. Police also undertook 'meet and greet' visits to meets once identified
- the Local Police Commander of Bracknell & Wokingham would help unblock the speedwatch training required by the PCSO in Birch Hill and Hanworth to get this project up and running again
- one strand of sexual exploitation was sex workers within organised crime but this was not a common occurrence in Bracknell Forest
- **the Local Police Commander Bracknell & Wokingham would provide data on how many knives were found when people were stopped and searched**
- it was explained that a community protection notice was a civil order that could be put in place for a fixed period of time with conditions to give the offender the opportunity to stop their behaviour. These could be issued by the police, local authority or housing associations if the powers were given to them
- in light of recent events, residents were advised that if they felt unsafe with any police officers they should ask for identification and ask the officer to call in or for the individual to call 999 in order to have confidence in the police service
- officers were discouraged from operating in plain clothes and this would only happen on specific operations but action/arrests would be made by uniformed officers
- if it was not possible to challenge officers there and then – get their officer number (displayed on their shoulders) and complain. If you don't feel safe, please tell the police

The Chair thanked the representatives of the Community Safety Partnership for their attendance and noted their success was a reflection of the successful partnership working undertaken. **The responses to questions submitted in advance of the meeting by Councillor Brown would be included with the minutes.** The Local

Police Commander for Bracknell & Wokingham thanked Alison O'Meara, Head of Community Safety and her team for their approach to partnership working.

37. **Council Plan Overview Report**

The Chief Executive of Bracknell Forest Council, Timothy Wheadon, introduced the Council Plan Overview Report (CPOR) covering the fourth quarter of 2020/21. There had been a delay in the circulation of the CPOR due to the impact on staff involved in the conduction of surge testing in the GU47 area. The Chief Executive therefore noted that the data was outdated.

The following questions were asked:

- In relation to the reference KPI reference L396 relating to the number of hours of staff time saved by utilising robotic process automation the Chief Executive clarified that this was software that undertook frequent and regular processes by picking up key words and phrases. The project had not progressed as prioritisation needed to be given to the roll out of Microsoft Teams.
- In response to a query about the lack of spare laptops across the borough it was confirmed that there was a global shortage of microprocessors and ICT were working on utilising older equipment.
- The Chief Executive was asked to comment on the Prime Minister's speech during the Conservative Party Conference that no housing was to be built on the green belt. The Chief Executive reiterated that the Council had decided on the Local Plan for Bracknell Forest and this is what would be delivered.
- It was acknowledged that the CPOR contained a full list of what had been achieved during this particularly difficult year.
- It was queried how the internal review of contracts within Forest Care could yield a saving of £0.184m during a pandemic. The Chief Executive explained that this was actually increased income and a positive positive rather than a reduction of provision.
- Clarification was sought on the underspend of £0.940m within Early Help and Communities and it was explained that the biggest underspend had occurred because processes had been improved to reduce the provision of bad debts. The staffing vacancies had been held during the pandemic while they were not required rather than a reduction in the staff team.
- In response to a question relating to the absence of a Service Level Agreement with South Hill Park it was noted that the Council wanted to agree a two or three year agreement but South Hill Park were not in a position to do that until after the budget had been set.
- The Chief Executive would confirm after the meeting whether the Youth Centre in the town centre was open and welcoming young people.

38. **Work Programme Update**

Each Panel Chair provided a verbal update on work programme progress.

Environment and Communities

The scope for the proposed Residential Parking review required further work before being considered by the Commission.

Education, Skills and Growth

The scope for the proposed SEND review required further work before being considered by the Commission and discussions had been started with officers to establish a deliverable schedule.

The Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) review activity programme had been completed and the report was being drafted.

Health and Care

The Mental Health review activity programme was in development and a series of meeting dates had been proposed.

CHAIRMAN

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Questions submitted before or during the meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Commission on 7 October 2021:

1. How is the extent of substance misuse assessed?

I liaised with the Head of the Drug and Alcohol Service and what we do know is:

- how many are referred into treatment
- how many people engage with treatment, and
- how many successfully complete treatment

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What we don't know is:

- people who aren't referred or seek support

Public Health England do produce some estimates of the number of users for all areas but our Drug and Alcohol Service has found that this is out of kilter with what is being seen locally.

However, the Drug and Alcohol Service are linked in with Public Health to look at conducting a Health and Wellbeing Needs Assessment which will look at levels of substance misuse and mental health so that we know where we need to focus going forward.

2. How is the extent of ASB assessed?

- Reports to police
- Queries to the Community Safety Team – Harm and vulnerability matrix used to determine level of risk to the victim
- Complaints to Housing Associations and to our local housing provision
- Complaints to Public Protection Partnership
- Complaints to Lexicon
- Complaints to Street Cleansing
- Complaints to public facilities e.g. community centres
- Community Trigger Applications

If one agency on its own can't solve the issue, it is referred to the Partnership Problem-solving groups for a multi-agency approach

3. To whom should ASB and substance misuse be reported and why?

If the ASB is linked to suspected drug-related activity, police.

This is because it is a criminal activity and is likely to need an enforcement response and may require police powers.

If a multi-agency approach is needed, police can refer to PPSG for us, together with any relevant Housing Associations including Silva Homes, to consider the tools and powers contained in the ASB, Crime and Policing Act which includes community protection notices, civil injunctions, criminal behaviour orders and closure orders

4. The police reporting website does not cover all eventualities, and possible evidence is undoubtedly lost as a result. What can the public do to report such events properly when they cannot get through on the phone?

Calls into 101 are currently at an average of 4 minute wait time for Nov 2021 and under 2 minutes for the year. An alternative is using the on-line reporting process where contact will be made back to the caller. There are notifications during such reporting that if there is a crime in process or immediate police assistance is required to call 999. If the matter being reported is not covered by the on-line reporting I would encourage those reporting to use the 101 number. There may well be occasions when demand causes longer delays, by the nature of demand for police services it is difficult to accurately predict call volumes and this accounts for the variation. Please remain patient and the call will be answered.

5. Why was the Police desk at Bracknell closed? What special arrangements have residents had to make to access Police services since this closure?

This briefing note was sent to all MPs informing them of the changes to front counter provision across TVP:

Changes to the future of our front counter provision

- We will be changing some of the ways in which people access our front counter services across Buckinghamshire, Berkshire and Oxfordshire.
- We are adapting to the different ways people now wish to make contact with us to ensure we continue to meet the changing needs of the diverse communities we serve.
- Front counters at Amersham, Bicester, Bracknell, HQ South in Kidlington, and Witney will close. These counters have already been closed since March 2020 due to the global Covid-19 pandemic, with the exception of HQ South in Kidlington, which reopened following an initial closure. Some of the opening hours of the other front counters will also change. All changes come in to force from 30 August this year.
- We held a public consultation in January this year and carefully considered the 70 responses we received before making a decision.
- There will continue to be good geographic coverage of front counters across the Thames Valley if your constituents need to access one but they can access many of our core services online or by calling 101.
- These changes do not affect police officer numbers nor the number of operational police bases so you will not experience any difference in the ongoing commitment we have to visible policing.

6. How many police constables; special constables; and PCSOs are dedicated to the Bracknell Forest area? And how many 5 years ago?

This information is operationally sensitive and therefore will not be provided. If there are gaps in service that are causing issues for the community please contact Superintendent Andrew Cranidge and he can report back.

7. How many cases of modern slavery have been identified in the Bracknell Forest area in each of the last 5 years? Is this decreasing now?

Data starts from 2018 when it began to be collected

<i>Bracknell and Wokingham</i>	NRM referrals	MS1 notifications
2018	12	0
2019	19	3

2020	30	7
2021 so far	3	5

NRM (National Referral Mechanism): referrals for support by government for all children and adults who consent)

MS1 (Duty to Notify): anonymous information to government of non-consenting adults

Referrals of a suspected victim to the NRM has more than doubled over the last 2 years and this is what we would expect because the Modern Slavery Act and its duties was launched in 2015 and much work has taken place since then in terms of awareness with the public (signs to look out for) and training with front line professionals who are likely to come into contact with suspected victims through their interactions in the community. So through our work on this locally, we would expect to see more suspected victims being identified and more reports and referrals being made.

8. What links are there between youths without a leisure focus (e.g. not doing football; music; computer games) and youths involved in drug and alcohol abuse, and crime?

Essentially, when we consider what makes a young person vulnerable to commit crime and use drugs and alcohol, we look at protective factors and risk factors. Protective factors will include things like stable home environments, positive relationships, high self-esteem etc. and risk factors will comprise things like parental depression, domestic abuse, rejection by peers, mental health needs. The more protective factors and fewer risk factors may influence their propensity to commit crime and use drugs and alcohol.

Engaging in a sport/leisure activity will be a protective factor but may not be sufficient – other positive factors may be needed.

9. PCC Priority 4: Improving the Criminal Justice System:
Given that in the last 11 years the Government has closed 295 Courts; there is currently a backlog of around 60K cases; and the Legal Aid System has been cut by 38% preventing lower paid people from getting justice: how will the PCC improve the Criminal Justice System?

Police and Crime Commissioner response required and will follow

10. PCC Priority 5: Illegal encampments:
Do we have sufficient legal encampments for Travellers across the Bracknell Forest Council area and across the PCC's area of influence?

BFC commissioned an accommodation needs assessment for gypsies, travellers and travelling show people and this was published in 2017. The Council is considering the need to refresh this to ensure alignment with our emerging Local Plan. The Council is allocating 8 pitches at Jealots Hill as part of a new settlement to meet future needs. The Housing Service also manage a site with 13 permanent pitches. There are other privately owned sites in the borough.

There is a travelling show persons site north of Binfield and there was no identified need in the study for further travelling show persons plots in the last assessment.

11. How has Community Safety funding for Domestic Abuse changed in the last 5 years?
What services are commissioned?

BFC Funding to Refuge: Unchanged

BFC Funding to Community Safety : Decrease from 2014/15 (£100K) to 2019/20 (£54,600)

BUT:

- we are delivering more inhouse than 5 years ago e.g. Family Safeguarding Model, Early Help's DART programme and Plain Talking (early intervention for those with unhealthy relationships which could escalate to DA)
- the Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner is commissioning more across Thames Valley e.g. Victims First, BRAVE, Positive Relationships Programme for Perpetrators, support for male victims (Mankind) and for LGBTQ+ victims (Support U). More have been commissioned for 22/23
- We are also tapping into local charities such as Kaleidosopic and SAFE!

BFC currently Commission:

- 11 refuge beds with support with BWA
- 1.5 FTE Independent Domestic Violence Advocate (IDVA) and Outreach Worker
- 1 FTE Outreach Worker funded for 12 months during COVID
- DA Co-ordinator – 2 days per week

Also, central government have introduced new DA duties for LAs and have provided funding to us specifically for support to survivors who are based in government-defined safe accommodation and we are currently producing a strategy on what we will be looking to deliver in the next 3 years with that funding.

12. The Local Police Commander Bracknell & Wokingham would provide arrest rates, prosecution figures, conviction and reoffending rates to the Commission

Year to date Arrest Data

Bracknell and Wokingham LPA arrested 1625 people in this period. This is a slight decrease over 2020-21 (1531) but much higher than 2018-19 (1120).

During this period Bracknell and Wokingham LPA had 1551 positive outcomes. This is an increase of 8% on the previous year. 505 of these cases resulted in the person being charged and summonsed to court. This is a decrease of 26% from the previous year. This is expected as there is a large drive to increase the out of court disposals.

Further data for prosecutions & reoffending to follow.

Currently it is not possible to break this data down into specifically Bracknell area. This is something the Service Improvement Department are trying to change.

13. The Local Police Commander Bracknell & Wokingham would provide data on how many knives were found when people were stopped and searched

Knife Possession/Searching - 12 months

During the last 12 months Bracknell and Wokingham LPA conducted 946 stop searches. In relation to weapon offences 10% were recorded as the primary reason for the search. The data does not breakdown the type of weapon searched for. It does show that the primary item searched for was recovered in 2% of these cases. However 16% of these cases found another article and a positive outcome was obtained.

There is a distinction between knife crime and knife possession. Knife possession is simply having a blade or sharply pointed article in a public place without lawful authority. However knife crime can be any offence where a knife is threatened to be used (even if it was never produced or seen).

Bracknell and Wokingham recorded 17 possession bladed or sharply pointed articles (year to date). 74% of these resulted in formal action being taken against the individual. This is a significant increase from the previous period which was 59%. 13% of these cases resulted in the person being charged or summoned to court. The remainder were dealt with out of court. This included 5 children who were referred to the youth offending team for intervention work.

Currently it is not possible to break this data down into specifically Bracknell area. This is something the Service Improvement Department are trying to change.

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