



Horsham
District
Council

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Scrutiny & Overview Committee

Interim Report of the Antisocial
Behaviour Working Group

Report of the Antisocial Behaviour Working Group

1. Introduction

To commence our work as defined by the terms of reference, the Working Group, while acknowledging that figures existed on levels of antisocial behaviour, wanted to have a better feel for the types and levels of antisocial behaviour within the parishes.

The responses to a questionnaire devised by the Group, both surprised and pleased us. It was, the very helpful contribution from Commander Trimmer informing us of the likely changes to frontline policing numbers, and, the reduction to funding for the Community Safety Team that shaped our debate.

These are our interim findings.

2. Membership

Councillors: Sue Rogers (Chairman) George Cockman, Roy Cornell, Chris Mason, Godfrey Newman, David Skipp, Tricia Youtan

3. Objectives of the Review

The review of antisocial behaviour in the District was originally initiated following a meeting of the Horsham District Community Partnership. At the meeting a list of “hot topics” was devised by the Community Planning Manager, of areas of particular concern which had been identified by the parish councils. One area which was raised by a number of parishes was antisocial behaviour.

The Scrutiny & Overview Committee then reviewed the list of ‘hot topics’ and agreed that antisocial behaviour in the District was a valid area for review by a short term working group.

The scope and terms of reference were agreed at the Group’s first meeting:

Scope

To explore the antisocial behaviour in the District and address how this could be prevented

Terms of Reference

1. To review which areas are of particular concern in the District for anti-social behaviour
2. To explore the reasons for the anti-social behaviour
3. To examine what action could be taken to prevent this

4. Summary of the Research Undertaken

Definition of Antisocial Behaviour

The Working Group noted that the legal definition of antisocial behaviour was defined under the Crime and Disorder Act 1998 as *"behaviour likely to cause alarm, harassment or distress to members of the public not of the same household as the perpetrator"*.

And statutory nuisances were not covered by the same definition.

Questionnaires to all Parish and Neighbourhood Councils

A great deal of data was already available on antisocial behaviour so the Group was keen not to collect the same data again, however a questionnaire was devised asking parish and neighbourhood councils for their experiences of antisocial behaviour in their area, to contribute to the findings of the review.

In total 21, responses were received, the Working Group found the responses to the questionnaires very interesting; overall responses were consistent: residents felt "very safe" or "fairly safe" in both the day and night, however they were all "slightly" or "fairly" concerned the antisocial behaviour, which illustrated that the problem was related to perception.

There was common praise from the parish councils for their relationships with the PCSOs.

Chairman's visit to Antisocial Behaviour Unit at Horsham Police Station

On 1st December 2011 the Chairman visited the Antisocial Behaviour Unit at Horsham Police Station.

I began by understanding the referral procedure. This is a one step process used by a number of bodies including police, wardens, PCSO's, or the general public. It is clean and without unnecessary bureaucracy.

At that point a consistent staged procedure is initiated to engage with the individual and their parents (if necessary) and uses a number of tools such as warning letters, anti social and acceptable behaviour contracts and a range of tactical options. There are a wide range of courses and interventions at the team's disposal which can and may include a number of outside agencies within the criminal justice system including the Anti Social Behaviour Order (ASBO) procedure within the Courts.

I was provided with data on the number of referrals and the subsequent actions on a rolling month basis.

I was given a demonstration of the information that is held electronically on various individuals on which a full history of the various interventions by numerous agencies is made. This will often be used as part of regular multi

agency meetings. This will comprise of many hours of work and meetings with some very disruptive and damaged individuals.

There is good evidence of sharing data across the county and wider outside Horsham District.

My personal view of this operation is that it is efficient and I could see no evidence of waste both in terms of time or process. The team use both a direct and holistic approach to each problem which is as individual and/or complex as the issue before them. Councillor Sue Rogers

Hearing from Chief Inspector Mark Trimmer and Sharon Parker

Chief Inspector Mark Trimmer provided Members with some useful information for the review; he explained the importance of residents registering their complaints or reporting antisocial behaviour, otherwise the police could not collect the intelligence and evidence which they needed.

Members of the public were encouraged to raise concerns, especially through the Neighbourhood Panels, who could hold the police to account.

The results of the questionnaires were considered to be reflective of the situation in the District; however perception was the big challenge.

The Working Group noted that the Sussex Police was facing cuts. In addition, as of November 2012 there would be a Police and Crime Commissioner (PCC) who would set the direction for the police and community safety funding.

The Police and Crime Commissioner would make decisions regarding budgets and objectives. He would also have the powers to dictate the objectives and funding of the Community Safety Partnership.

The Antisocial Behaviour Unit was currently grant funded by Area Based Grant and was likely to be at risk, the Group agreed this was an area which the Council should be focusing on.

Members wanted to know what the Council would be doing in preparation for the cuts.

The Working Group recognised how important “feeling safe” was and how important it was to try and find the funding to keep the Antisocial Behaviour Unit.

The **Director of Community Services** and the **Community Safety Manager** were invited to discuss the future and the funding of the Antisocial Behaviour Unit

The Council was currently unaware of the PCC’s plans for the funding and how the Antisocial Behaviour Team would be funded after 2013, as it was mainly afforded by the grant.

There was concern that Horsham District would be more at risk of reduced funding than other areas such as Brighton and Hove, as crime rates were reasonably low in Horsham in comparison and any funding may be diverted to the areas with higher crime rates.

5. Overall Conclusions

Item 6 of the District Plan Priorities 2011-2015, seeks as a priority, a safer and healthier place to live. The results from the 21 parishes and neighbourhoods who completed the Antisocial Behaviour Questionnaire, presented a very positive picture towards achieving that objective. All 21 responses stated that they felt safe or very safe in their parishes both day and night.

Conversely the questionnaire reported the concern in parishes of the fear of antisocial behaviour, depicting how strongly that perception exists and the challenge of changing that.

Overall the tools to tackle antisocial behaviour are surprisingly few. The work of the Community Safety Team incorporating the Antisocial Behaviour Unit contributes significantly to the current positive position. In 2011 the team received 339 referrals from across the district and whilst this number is low as a percentage of the 130,000 residents, the impact of the ripple affect of antisocial behaviour on a community cannot be overstated.

Other instruments to combat antisocial behaviour used by the parishes include a good youth provision and a strong relationship with police and PCSO's. Both of these are under threat from the reduction in frontline policing and the planned withdrawal of youth subsidy from our district, which will be focused on areas where crime figures determine greater need, likely Brighton and Crawley.

A reduction in rural bus services which will limit travel for young people for recreation is seen by the committee, together with the other elements recorded above could be seen as heading towards a 'perfect storm' and a clear risk to our current achievement.

Some parishes were making good use of CCTV and lighting dark areas and consideration of these in combating antisocial behaviour could be achieved by using S106 and by including such on the CIL Levy lists.

Neighbourhood wardens were seen as very valuable in the limited number of parishes where they are employed and if more decided to follow this model then planning for this in the precept would need to take place.

6. Chairman's Conclusions

Members felt, that **all** options should be considered in order to identify the funding to retain the Community Safety Team, including raising the Council tax.

For 2010/11 the cost of the unit was £84,531. There are 56, 232 houses in the district, which equates to 3p per household per week or £1.50 per annum.

The survey can sit as a health check for the district and be repeated periodically to monitor any change.

Such is the importance to our district community that the Working Group feel it should remain in situ and reconvene at appropriate intervals given the potential changes already highlighted.

7. Recommendations to the Scrutiny & Overview Committee

The Scrutiny & Overview Committee should note the success of the Antisocial Behaviour Unit and the positive response from the community to the questionnaires.

Members should also recognise the time frame as there was a risk that the current Antisocial Behaviour team, who were at risk of losing their jobs, as a result of the cuts, may be inclined to search for alternative secure employment, therefore the Council would lose valuable skills and expertise which was contributing to the low crime rates that the District was enjoying.

Therefore the Working Group recommended:

That the Council should be prepared for no further funding for the Antisocial Behaviour team after 2013 and therefore explore any alternative sources of funding and reorganise priorities, in order to maintain the services which the Council is currently providing.

The Working Group will continue to meet in order to monitor the situation.

**Councillor Sue Rogers
Chairman of the Antisocial Behaviour Working Group
February 2012**