

WILLENHALL NORTH/WILLENHALL SOUTH/SHORT HEATH AREA PANEL MEETING

Willenhall Chart, 19 Gomer Street, Willenhall, WV13 2NS

12 January 2017 at 6.00 pm

Members in attendance

Councillor Ian Shires (Vice-Chair in the Chair)
Councillor Daniel Barker
Councillor Sarah Jane Cooper
Councillor Diane Coughlan
Councillor Sean Coughlan
Councillor Darren Hazell
Councillor Elizabeth Hazell
Councillor Adam Hicken

Others in attendance

Councillor Judy Foster - Assistant Police and Crime Commissioner (Councillor Foster represents the Brockmoor and Pensnett Ward in the Borough of Dudley and is the Deputy Leader of Dudley Council. She was attending the meeting as the Assistant Police and Crime Commissioner)
Ms Donna Macarthur - Director of Primary Care, Walsall Clinic Commissioning Group
Dr Carsten Lesshafft – General Practitioner at the Croft Surgery
Mr Peter Grainger - Chair of Lockfield Surgery PPG
Mr Michael Greenfield - Area Manager
Mr Mark Flanagan - Station Commander, West Midlands Fire Service
Mr Liam Perrens - Frank F Harrison Youth Support
Mr Robert Williams - Chair of Lockstown Practice PPG
Ms Lisa Wolverson - Assistant Manager, Lockstown Practice
Inspector Sophie Worthington - West Midlands Police
Mr Craig Goodall - Senior Democratic Services Officer
Dr Paul Fantom - Democratic Services Officer

1/17 Apologies

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Carl Creaney.

2/17 Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

3/17 Local Government (Access to Information) Act 1985 (as amended)

None.

4/17 Discussion on Policing with Assistant Police and Crime Commissioner, Councillor Judy Foster

Following a welcome from the Members of the Area Panel, Councillor Foster provided an overview of her work as the Assistant Police and Crime Commissioner and answered questions from Members and other attendees.

In her presentation, Councillor Foster explained the responsibilities and working relationship of the Police and Crime Commissioner (PCC) and the Chief Constable. The PCC was responsible lobbying for resources, setting the budget and allocating resources, and implementing political priorities; the Chief Constable had complete responsibility for operational matters, the allocation of police officers and the delivery of services. Councillor Foster noted that as with all police forces, West Midlands Police was in a period of transition, and gave examples including the application of mobile devices and improvements to the Force website to make it more interactive.

When responding to a question from the Vice-Chair on matching funding to local needs, Councillor Foster stated that the PCC lobbied central government for resources. She added that due to austerity measures, West Midlands Police had been underfunded for several years. There was an expectation that central government funding would continue to decrease with the Council Tax precept having to increase, thereby increasing the force's dependence on taxpayers. However, it was noted by Members that there were limits on the amount of Council Tax that an authority could raise without a referendum.

There was discussion of the importance of political engagement of elected Members, citizens and other organisations with the Police via the Active Citizens Agenda to facilitate addressing problems such as the under-reporting of crime. In regard to the reconfiguration of local police teams, Inspector Worthington stated that prior to November 2016 there had been two neighbourhood teams, each headed by a Sergeant. There was now a single team of seven officers, led by a Sergeant, which made it the second largest team in the Borough; however, it was also noted that one team member was currently on secondment, another on maternity leave and there was one vacancy. Councillor Foster and Inspector Worthington stressed that previously police officers and Police Community Support Officers (PCSOs) could be reallocated elsewhere. This would not happen with the new configuration. In addition, there were two fully warranted student officers that will be attached to the Team on a rotation basis. They will also be working alongside the core members of the neighbourhood team.

Further questions from Members concerned the recruitment of officers to replace those who were retiring. Councillor Foster confirmed that there was to be a recruitment of 800 police officers, 150 PCSOs and 200 support staff, but added that these were not additional posts. Furthermore, there was recognition of changes to the nature of crime with the advent of cyber crime and the responses required. The 2020 Transformation Programme emphasised utilising fewer police officers and employing technology such as body-worn cameras that acted as a visual deterrent. Reflecting the wishes of the public, the supportive role of the police and the importance of neighbourhood policing was noted by Members.

Further to a question on the necessity of police officers holding university degrees, Councillor Foster stated that discussions were ongoing. Inspector Worthington added that there was recognition of the changing nature of the role of police officers and the increased variety of skills they now required to perform their duties. The potential disadvantaging of otherwise capable applicants was undesirable, and given the significant financial costs of studying for a degree, there would be a work-based route to ensure training to degree standard.

The Vice-Chair referred to the sharing of Council buildings and facilities with the Police, and Councillor Foster confirmed that in Dudley this had been progressed by liaison between the Estates Departments of the police and local authority.

In discussing the necessity of the police working with agencies and organisations to tackle criminal activity, Members referred to the importance of the views of young people, and a Member highlighted the feedback recently received from students at the University of Wolverhampton. Councillor Foster added that the importance of engaging with young people was recognised by its inclusion as a separate component of West Midlands Police's Crime Plan. Furthermore, there was the work of Youth Commissioners whose remit was also linked to economic regeneration.

Further to a Member's enquiry regarding Staffordshire's Smart Alert App, and whether West Midlands Police would consider a similar application, it was stressed that further research on the effectiveness of this was required since there were some categories of crime, such as domestic violence, where it would be inappropriate.

In concluding the item the Vice-Chair thanked Councillor Foster for her presentation attending the meeting.

Resolved:

That further feedback on policing be provided to the Area Panel in six months' time. This feedback should include details on the outcome of the Police transformation plan and how the Police and Crime Commissioner responds to the challenges faced by young people.

5/17 GP Services

The Area Panel discussed local GP services, with a verbal presentation being made by Donna Macarthur, Director of Primary Care at Walsall Clinical Commissioning Group and Dr Carsten Lesshafft of the Croft Surgery.

This noted that primary care was the bedrock of the National Health Service, with nine out of ten contacts being with GPs. However, because of an aging population with increasingly complex health needs, coupled with patients' rising expectations, GPs found themselves under increased pressure. This was compounded because of the impact on the GP workforce of practitioners leaving or retiring at a greater rate than they could be replaced. There was further pressure because of the ten years that it took to fully train a GP.

Within the Willenhall North/Willenhall South/Short Heath area, significant levels of deprivation and health inequality contributed to lower life expectancy, and an East-West split was discernible within the Borough. In order to address this, the Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG) worked with Public Health and was seeking to commission additional services, for example in respect of diabetes.

Locally, it was noted that the area was covered by 10 practitioners and due to their differences in size there were variations in the services delivered. The GPs provided a service that the Care Quality Commission had rated at good at 6 practices. It was an objective of the CCG's Primary Care Strategy to ensure that GP services in the Borough were rated as good/outstanding. To alleviate pressure, national investment of £2.4bn was to be made and there was additional funding of £500m of which Walsall would receive a share. The key theme was access to GP practices over five days per week and increasing by 2019 to seven day access with coverage of evenings and weekends to relieve pressures on obtaining appointments.

Members noted that improvements were necessary in order to reduce the rate of missed appointments and related the experience in relation to practices in the area. The reasons for missed appointments were also considered, and it was conveyed that these could include appointments no longer being required or patients forgetting they had the appointment. Dr Lesshafft related the approach adopted by his own health centre with, for example, patients being screened by a practice nurse prior to assessment, since patients did not always require a GP appointment.

Ms Macarthur advised that the CCG needed to hear about such experiences and that Walsall Council's Social Care and Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee was due to meet next week and would discuss access to GP services. Whilst practitioners were working to improve the availability of appointments, it was noted that in many cases relevant advice could also be sought from other professionals such as pharmacists. There was recognition that due to the high level of deprivation in the area, parents would take their children to a GP surgery or to A & E because they could get the medication without incurring a cost, whereas a pharmacy would charge them for the item. Ms Macarthur noted that under the Pharmacy First service, no fees would be charged, and that the service needed greater publicity. Reference was also made to the system in Dudley, which worked successfully because services were joined up.

Further to a question on whether patients who had not attended an appointment with their GP in five years were removed from the practice list, Ms Macarthur confirmed that this was not the case. Periodically, GP lists would be reviewed and cleansed to remove 'ghost patients'. However, such patients would be written to and asked to contact their practice before being removed. Furthermore, GPs were able to override this process.

In closing the item the Vice-Chair thanked Ms McArthur and Dr Lesshafft for attending the meeting.

Resolved:

That further feedback on GP services be provided to the Area Panel in six to nine months' time.

6/17 Area Manager's Report

The Area Manager presented his report to Members.

In referring to the efforts of West Midlands Police's neighbourhood teams to achieve early intervention and problem resolution, the Area Manager highlighted the Active Citizens Fund. This enabled the Police to better engage with the public via community projects and schemes. Sergeant Nick Morton was leading on this initiative and it was noted that a funding workshop had been held in November.

It was reported by the Area Manager that anti-social behaviour issues had recently occurred at a fast food outlet, with young people who visited the outlet in order to use the Wi-Fi connection, but who were verbally abusing the other customers. There had been interventions and banning orders were being organised.

Reference was made to the burglary of a number of dwellings. Inspector Worthington confirmed that whilst criminal activity had increased within the last two weeks, two persons had been arrested (one of whom was in the process of committing the crime at the time of arrest) and it was expected that there would be a reduction in such criminal activity as a consequence of these arrests.

With reference to the incidents attended to by the Fire Service, the Station Commander confirmed that there had been 62 during November-December 2016. The causes of the incidents included fires started as a result of cooking, faults to white goods and that some of which were arson-related, with refuse being set on fire. It was also noted that on the previous day there had been a fire at a building in Villiers Street that had been used by homeless people and in which there was evidence of drug taking. No fatalities had been reported.

A Member pointed out that the Fire Service consultation on funding and governance had ended on 4 January 2017, with over 5,000 returns being received, and the outcome of which would be known in February. It was further noted that a budget report was being made to the West Midlands Combined Authority, with £10m in cuts having to be accommodated over the next four years. Members praised the manner in which the Fire Brigades Union (FBU) and the West Midlands Fire Service had worked together in order to lessen the impact the cuts would have on the community.

It was reported by Youth Co-ordinator that sessions for young people were currently being provided at New Invention and four sessions per week were available in Willenhall North, Willenhall South and Short Heath. However, a 50 per cent reduction to commissioned youth services would be forthcoming and the precise impact of this on the sessions was to be determined. Engagement with young people was also subject to further limitations because the Youth Service's Hopper vehicle was unavailable until the service level agreement had been completed.

The Panel noted that there were a number of concerns regarding the criteria, including future service provision of youth services. Comments were made by Members recognising that services were under stress and that many areas and towns had difficulty in accessing funding and match funding. It was reported that the Youth Team had opened the Willenhall Memorial Park Pavilion to young people on Thursday evenings. They had recently acquired the use of the newly renovated back room of the Bridge Pub, which would be available on Monday evenings.

Improving health, including well being and independence for older people, was discussed by the Panel, with particular emphasis on the healthy walks programme at Willenhall Memorial Park. The safety precautions for cycling in the dark were also mentioned. Members highlighted the importance of GPs recommending these forms of exercise to their patients.

Resolved:

That the report be noted.

7/17 Funding Applications

The Area Manager presented the funding report to Members. This included project applications carried forward from the previous financial year, projects approved under urgency by Area Managers following consultation with the Area Chair and Vice-Chair and relevant Ward Councillors, and the project applications for consideration (Shown in Appendix 1).

The Area Manager introduced each funding application and explained how they would contribute to the local area.

Resolved

That:

- 1) Willenhall E-ACT – School Kitchen initiative be awarded £1,765.00;**
- 2) Crime Prevention Willenhall & Short Heath be awarded £2,500.00;**
- 3) Friends of Fibbersley Park – Walkway Steps Repair be awarded £1,000.00;**
- 4) Frank F Harrison Community Association – Street based youth project resources be awarded £1,750.**

Date of next meeting

It was noted the date of the next meeting was 23 March 2017.

There being no other business the meeting terminated at 8.43 pm.

Chairman:

Date: