

Council Meeting - 20 April 2009

Notice of Motion – The Police Service

Background briefing

1. What is a Crime and Reduction Partnership?

The 1998 Crime and Disorder Act established partnerships between the police, local authorities, probation service, health authorities, the voluntary sector, and local residents and businesses. These are referred to as the “responsible authorities.”

These partnerships, which are known as Crime and Reduction Partnerships (CDRPs), are working to reduce crime and disorder in their area by:

- Establishing the levels of crime and disorder problems in their area, and consulting widely with the population of that area to make sure that the partnership’s perception matches that of local people.
- Devising a Community Safety Strategy containing measures to tackle those priority problems. This is to include targets, and target owners for each of the priority areas. The strategy will last for three years, but must be kept under review by the partnership.

The CDRP for Walsall is the Safer Walsall Partnership Board which is chaired by Cllr Perry. The Board has overseen the introduction of a number of effective arrangements to help deliver its plans and priorities including the Borough Tasking Group, comprising representatives of all the responsible authorities, which was established to ensure a highly responsive and coordinated response to community safety issues across the borough.

2. How much Council Tax is given to West Midlands Police?

Contribution from Council Tax to West Midlands Police Authority towards policing in Walsall is based on a set formula which every local authority in the region contributes to finance a proportion of the costs for policing. A breakdown of the police budget is sent to all council tax payers at the beginning of the new financial year. The contribution for 2009/10 is £77,901,692.

3. What are crime mapping and the policing pledge?

The Government’s crime strategy 'Cutting Crime: A New Partnership 2008-11', published in July 2007, contained a commitment to provide access to more and better local crime information for the public. Public crime mapping, as it is referred to, is part of the Government’s commitment to strengthen community engagement in policing, which is at the heart of the reform programme outlined in the Policing Green Paper in 2008. The crime maps allow the public to see how local crime fighting partnerships are impacting on issues of local concern and give people the information they need to

decide local priorities. Information provided is at ward level and includes information about burglary, robbery, theft, vehicle crime, violent crime and anti-social behaviour.

The Policing Pledge is a new set of promises from the police on the service they should provide and every force has committed to keeping those promises. The police promise to listen to public concerns, act on these concerns, and then keep people informed of the progress they've made. The Policing Pledge is now in force across the West Midlands. The Home Office is currently running a national campaign to promote the public's access to crime and policing information. The Safer Walsall Partnership is supporting the promotion of the Pledge and has been working closely with the police to develop an intensive package of activity that lets the public know about the Pledge. The Policing Pledge is being promoted through advertising on the back of buses travelling through key routes in Walsall. This is a major development and for the first time will give the public clear national minimum standards of service supported by locally negotiated pledges.

4. Local arrangements for police accountability

In addition to the work being done to promote the Policing Pledge, the police and the Safer Walsall Partnership have in place a wide range of arrangements to promote police accountability. The police and the council are working very closely, in particular through the Borough Tasking Group, Community Action Tasking meetings, and the policing of Walsall Town Centre. The police also regularly attend LNP meetings. The Partnership commenced a programme of Community Safety Question Time meetings with the first one held in Blakenall and Bloxwich in January at which senior representatives of the Partnership met with local residents to answer any queries or concerns about community safety within their community. Others are planned for each of the remaining LNPs. It is acknowledged that there are national concerns about police accountability but these need to be considered alongside the local arrangements which ensure a relatively high degree of accountability across the borough.

5. The Policing and Crime Bill

The Policing and Crime Bill, published last December, aims to increase effectiveness and public accountability of policing. The core principles behind the Bill are to empower local people by giving them a stronger voice in police decision-making, and greater freedoms and discretion for the police to concentrate on local policing priorities. Concern has been expressed that the bill would propose the reform of police authorities by replacing councillors with directly-elected crime and policing representatives (CPRs) which were proposed in the Policing Green Paper. However, the government has removed the provisions from the bill relating to the introduction of CPRs, and will be looking to bring in a statutory duty on the police to engage with people locally. Proposals to expand the statutory duties of CDRPs to include reducing re-offending and the tightening of the regulations on lap dancing clubs were welcomed by many local authorities. The Bill proposes to impose a statutory duty on police authorities to have regard to the views of people in their area about policing, and allows HM Inspectorate of Constabulary to assess police authorities' performance against this duty. Increasing police accountability at the very local level is what the public have consistently said they want to see.

In addition, provisions of the Police and Justice Act 2006 come into force at the end of this month to ensure that each local authority has a committee (the “crime and disorder committee”) with power to review or scrutinise decisions or actions taken by the responsible authorities of their crime and disorder functions; and make reports or recommendations to the local authority on these functions.

The Councillor Call for Action (CCfA) will also commence for crime and disorder matters. Government will shortly be issuing guidelines on both of these matters.

Jamie Morris
Executive Director

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