

STRONGER COMMUNITIES & NEIGHBOURHOOD SERVICES SCRUTINY BOARD

07 JUNE 2022

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(HYBRID MEETING)

MINUTES

Present: Councillors M Brain (substitute), M Carthew, B Donnelly, A Feeney, P Hogarth MBE, J O'Nyons, D Pinwell (substitute), W Qais, S Sheshabhatte.

Apologies:

Councillor B Groom.

Councillor G Sleight.

Councillor K Hawkins – Cabinet Member (Highways & Infrastructure).

Alan Brown (Assistant Director – Highways & Environment).

Caroline Murray (Senior Commissioning Manager for Domestic Abuse, Sexual Health & Sexual Abuse).

Report authors/witnesses in attendance:

Mrs Alison McGrory (Assistant Director – Communities & Partnerships).

Ruth Tennant - Director of Public Health and Commissioning (and Chair of the Solihull Domestic Abuse Partnership Board).

External Witnesses in attendance:

None.

Cabinet Members in attendance by invitation:

Councillor D Howell – Communities & Leisure Portfolio.

Councillor K Grinsell - Deputy Leader of the Council and Lead Member for Partnerships and Wellbeing Portfolio.

Other Elected Members in attendance by invitation:

None.

1. ELECTION OF CHAIRMAN

The following nominations were received and seconded:

- Councillor W Qais (Conservative Group nomination).
- Councillor S Sheshabhatte (Green Group nomination).

RESOLVED

That, Councillor W Qais be elected Chairman for the 2022/23 Municipal Year.

2. APPOINTMENT OF VICE-CHAIRMAN

The following nominations were received and seconded:

- Councillor P Hogarth MBE (Conservative Group nomination).

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- Councillor S Sheshabhattar (Green Group nomination).

RESOLVED

That, Councillor P Hogarth MBE be appointed Vice-Chairman for the 2022/23 Municipal Year.

3. DECLARATIONS OF PECUNIARY INTEREST AND CONFLICT OF INTEREST

It was recorded that Councillor M Brain was a Member of the West Midlands Police Independent Advisory Group for Domestic Violence.

4. QUESTIONS AND DEPUTATIONS

There were no questions or deputations.

5. DOMESTIC ABUSE ACT 2021 – PLANNED RESPONSE FOR THE DELIVERY OF NEW DUTIES

In attendance: Ruth Tennant - Director of Public Health and Commissioning (and Chair of the Solihull Domestic Abuse Partnership Board); Councillor D Howell – Communities & Leisure Portfolio; and Councillor K Grinsell - Deputy Leader of the Council and Lead Member for Partnerships and Wellbeing Portfolio.

The Director of Public Health and Commissioning (and in her capacity as Chair of the Solihull Domestic Abuse Partnership Board) submitted a detailed update to the Board to inform Members of the progress made towards the new duties brought into effect by the Domestic Abuse Act 2021.

In summary, the key work streams included:

- Transition of an existing multi-agency group into the statutory Domestic Abuse Partnership Board.
- Completion of a Needs Assessment to assess the demand for DA safe accommodation.
- Publication of Solihull's 2022-2025 Domestic Abuse Strategy, detailing the Partnership's approach for identifying and meeting the needs of DA safe accommodation.
- Commissioning of a new BAME 6-bed refuge, together with the submission of a planning application to support a larger Housing of Multiple Occupancy licence.
- Commissioning of dedicated children's support within refuges to achieve compliance.
- Commissioning of specialist Housing Advocates who will work directly with victims.
- Ongoing compliance with detailed data reporting requirements to the Department of Levelling Up, Housing and Communities.

Having considered the report, the Board asked the following questions and made the following observations:

- The increase in domestic abuse was clearly of concern. Officers were asked if any lessons had been learnt from previous strategies to ensure success with the current approach. The Director of Public Health and Commissioning highlighted that the Act brought into force a statutory responsibility and, with that, came a funding stream to support the delivery of new and strengthened services. The Board was also advised that work was also being undertaken to increase confidence amongst victims to report domestic abuse. The perception was that domestic abuse was historically

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under-reported. A number of initiatives to support this service improvement was verbally reported.

- The Board highlighting that attempting to contact the Police via either 101, or their live web-chat, to report domestic abuse could deter victims as the perceived performance of those two methods of police contact was still poor as waiting times were lengthy for calls to be answered. Members considered that this would have a direct effect on the under-reporting of domestic abuse. Officers were asked if there was any other way for victims of domestic abuse to contact the Police quickly and effectively (other than 999). The Director of Public Health and Commissioning advised that she would follow this up with Police colleagues at the Solihull Domestic Abuse Partnership Board.
- Members asked what work was being undertaken to ensure that the placement of refuges in residential areas was a success for both the victims of abuse and the existing community. The Director of Public Health and Commissioning advised of the safeguards brought about by the town planning requirements for houses of multiple occupancy. Housing for victims of abuse was often very discrete, by necessity, which lessened the direct impact on neighbouring properties and the community itself. The protection (and anonymity) of the victim was of paramount importance.
- In terms of the potential reasons for under-reporting, the Board highlighted that there was a perception that victims would not achieve a positive outcome and it was not apparent what the support measures would be. The importance of clear communication to publicise all methods of reporting was reiterated again.
- The Board highlighted that, often, the perpetrator would remain in the family home whilst the victims (and children) would seek refuge in alternative safe accommodation. Officers asked if that was always the best outcome for the victim where there was no initial consequences for the perpetrator. The Director of Public Health and Commissioning highlighted the work being undertaken around perpetrator programmes and gave reassurances around the need for immediate support for victims with the least disruption and, in the majority of cases, the instigation of criminal proceedings.
- Members also sought further information as to how the strategy covered allegations of abuse in other residential settings such as care homes and also what resources were available to e.g. community groups and religious organisations to support victims. The Director of Public Health and Commissioning highlighted the current work being undertaken by the Exploitation Board and the reporting routes available for elders who were being mistreated by their family or their carers. More work on communication and training was envisaged to enable key stakeholders within the community to spot the signs of domestic abuse and initiate those first conversations with victims and offer pathways to support.
- The Board asked what support was available for male victims to ensure there was a good level of confidence for those victims to report abuse. Members highlighted that the Council's website included a link to the Victim Support website with little other obvious direct information for male victims. The Director of Public Health and Commissioning advised that she would follow this up with the relevant colleagues.
- Members asked which GP services were not currently providing the reporting services for domestic abuse and if they were limited to any particular geographical area. The Director of Public Health and Commissioning advised that the vast majority of Solihull's GP's were providing that service and the overall number was steadily increasing (currently circa 80%). Ongoing work with the CCG would also increase participation. The Board also highlighted that difficulties in getting an appointment to see a GP in some areas of Solihull (particularly those GP's within the Solihull

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Healthcare Partnership at this time) could contribute to under-reporting and missed opportunities to have those first conversations with victims.

- The Board highlighted the importance of support pathways for children where settings, such as schools, picked up signs of domestic abuse. The Director of Public Health and Commissioning confirmed that children were now recognised as victims of domestic abuse and an element of the service going forwards would be to specifically support children.
- Members considered that, for future progress reports, it would be useful to scrutinise the Police response to domestic abuse to support the delivery of the statutory duties within the new Act. The Board anticipated that the new duties would also bring about better outcomes to reported incidents. The Director of Public Health and Commissioning confirmed that the Police were members of the Domestic Abuse Partnership Board and that Group regularly looked at the number of reported incidents and the associated Police response.
- The Board requested further information as to the (gender) funding split for victims of domestic abuse. The Director of Public Health and Commissioning advised that the number of male victims was lower and this was reflected in the funding proportion (although specific data was not on hand at the meeting). The Board was advised that the funding allocations needed to be correct for the victims who needed access to the services.
- Members highlighted the importance of awareness campaigns as, with some categories of domestic abuse such as coercive control, the victims did not always recognise the signs of abuse themselves. The Director of Public Health and Commissioning confirmed that improvements to awareness and communication formed part of the ongoing work already being undertaken.
- With regard to prevention and early intervention, the Board highlighted the importance of working with children and young people to teach them about respect and behaviours within healthy adult relationships.

Councillor D Howell, Communities & Leisure Portfolio Holder, reaffirmed the importance of the work progressed to date and highlighted the need for a new objective to be included within the Council Plan to underpin this multi-agency work. Equally, the importance of Partnership working was also seen as a key element of the strengthened Domestic abuse service, going forwards.

Councillor K Grinsell, Deputy Leader of the Council and Lead Member for Partnerships and Wellbeing Portfolio, also spoke in support of a number of ongoing campaigns to support victims and to highlight reporting pathways (e.g. ask Angela and ask Annie).

RESOLVED

That, subject to the comments and views recorded in the preamble above, the Board **UNANIMOUSLY**:

- (i) Endorses all work undertaken, to date, towards the new duties brought into effect by the Domestic Abuse Act 2021, together with the publication of Solihull's new Domestic Abuse Strategy;
- (ii) That the Solihull Domestic Abuse Partnership Board be invited to consider the feasibility of an alternate means for victims of domestic abuse to contact the Police (non-emergency) without having to use either 101 or live web-chat (to encourage reporting);

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- (iii) That the information contained on the Council's website to support male victims of domestic abuse be reviewed to ensure clear reporting routes and support mechanisms are more easily accessible; and
- (iv) That a further progress report be considered in six month's time (December 2022).

6. COMMONWEALTH GAMES 2022 UPDATE

In attendance: Mrs Alison McGrory (Assistant Director – Communities & Partnerships); Ruth Tennant - Director of Public Health and Commissioning; and Councillor K Grinsell - Deputy Leader of the Council and Lead Member for Partnerships and Wellbeing Portfolio.

The Assistant Director – Communities & Partnerships submitted a detailed report to give a full appraisal of Solihull's involvement in the delivery of the Games and to highlight a number of potential legacies for the Borough. The report was complimented by a short video, which was shown in parallel with the consideration of the written report.

In summary, the report highlighted:

- Key Project work streams in the build up to the Games – which included service area specific updates for Transport, Highways & Infrastructure; Regulatory & Enforcement; Resilience; Street Scene; Inclusion & Communities; Economy & Tourism; and Health Protection.
- Queens Baton Relay – details of the route for the Baton that would travel through the majority of the Borough and all associated community and Town Centre events.
- Events Programme – established alongside key Partners to create a programme that would be accessible to all residents and communities.
- Engagement Plans – a number of drop-in sessions had been arranged to answer questions and capture feedback from residents, communities and businesses.
- Legacy Objectives – a number of objectives for Solihull had been aligned to the Games to help the region to “grow and succeed”, “put Solihull on the global stage”, “improve health and wellbeing”, and to “bring people together”.

Having considered the report, the Board asked the following questions and made the following observations:

- The Board highlighted that both the NEC and the Airport were situated within Solihull, rather than Birmingham. The Council, wherever possible, should promote that to ensure the Borough “is put on the map”. It was considered that the route of the Queens Baton Relay would help with that national recognition.
- The Board sought assurances that the current reported difficulties with air travel would not impact on the timely arrival of athletes and visitors. The Assistant Director – Communities & Partnerships confirmed that meetings with the Airport Company were regularly held to ensure the successful delivery of the Games. All arriving athletes would be processed at the NEC itself.
- Members asked if there was any indication at this stage of the number of hotel bookings within Solihull. The Assistant Director – Communities & Partnerships confirmed that an enormous amount of work was being undertaken to promote tourism within the Borough and that work included the promotion of the Borough's hotel trade. Those hotels located near to the NEC itself would house some of the athletes for the duration of the Games.

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- Members highlighted that whilst it was pleasing to note that the Baton Relay would be within the Borough for an entire day, it was disappointing that some Wards had not been included in the overall route. The Assistant Director – Communities & Partnerships advised the final route was determined and approved by the Organising Committee against their own criteria.
- The report highlighted that the Games would be broadcast on a large, open air, screen in Solihull Town Centre. The Board asked if that facility was just limited to that location or if similar facilities would be made available in other parts of Solihull. The Assistant Director – Communities & Partnerships highlighted the cost and logistics of the live broadcast screens, the locations of which had to be agreed with the Organising Committee. The Board was advised that the aim of that resource was to draw spectators away from the NEC, to spend their time in Solihull Town Centre whilst still being able to watch live events.
- Participation from local business was highlighted and Officers were asked if there was a deadline for local business to register their support to get involved with the planned (non-sponsor) community activities. The Assistant Director – Communities & Partnerships advised that there was no deadline to register and all support and involvement would be welcomed.
- The Board asked if the Council had enough resources to support the delivery of the Games and to carry on with its “business as usual” services. The Assistant Director – Communities & Partnerships confirmed that enough resources were available and there would be no impact on other, key, day to day Council services. The Board did note, however, that there would be an added pressure on all blue light services during the Games calendar.
- Members highlighted the importance of engaging with all sectors of the community to ensure the success of the legacy plan, going forwards. The Assistant Director – Communities & Partnerships advised the Board of a number of work streams being undertaken to maximise the legacy opportunities, particularly those around physical activity and community cohesion.
- The Board sought further information as to what transport links would be in place to ensure visitors could easily travel from the NEC to, e.g., Solihull Town Centre. The Assistant Director – Communities & Partnerships advised that the Transport, Highways & Infrastructure Cell working with Transport for West Midlands had oversight of the Borough’s travel and connectivity elements of the Games. Travel was also included within the ticket price for the individual events.
- Members also highlighted the importance of communication and asked what work was being done to ensure inclusivity, particularly with those residents that were considered hard to reach. The Assistant Director – Communities & Partnerships outlined the key work being undertaken by local community groups to support those lines of communication.

RESOLVED

That, subject to the comments and views recorded in the preamble above, the Board **UNANIMOUSLY**:

- (i) Notes, endorses and welcomes the full appraisal of Solihull’s involvement in the delivery of the Games and notes the number of potential legacies for the Borough; and
- (ii) That a further report be considered in 12 months time to review the progress made towards the reported future legacies.

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7. WORK PROGRAMME 2022/2023

The Boards draft Work Plan was submitted for consideration and approval. The Plan highlighted a number of topics for consideration during 2022/23, and a proportion of the Plan was also set around the requirement to act as the statutory "Crime & Disorder Committee".

In considering the Work Plan, a Member suggested that the Strategic Assessment of the Third Sector should also be included for consideration as a topic this year. The suggestion was unanimously supported.

RESOLVED

That, the Board:

- (i) Approves its Work Plan for 2022/23, as submitted, and subject to the inclusion of the Strategic Assessment of the Third Sector.

(End time 7.45pm)