

**STRONGER COMMUNITIES AND NEIGHBOURHOOD SERVICES SCRUTINY  
BOARD – 16 February 2022**

**STRONGER COMMUNITIES & NEIGHBOURHOOD SERVICES SCRUTINY BOARD**

**16 FEBRUARY 2022**

**(HYBRID MEETING)**

**MINUTES**

Present: Councillor Mrs D Holl-Allen MBE (Chairman). Councillors M Brain, D Gibbin, B Groom, P Hogarth MBE, M Parker, W Qais (Vice-Chairman), S Sheshabhattar and M Wilson.

Apologies:

Nick Page – Chair of the Safer Solihull Community Safety Partnership.

Report authors/witnesses in attendance (in person):

Mrs Alison McGrory (Assistant Director – Communities & Partnerships) – Key Priority Lead: Hate Crime.

Gillian Crabbe (Community Safety Lead).

Chief Superintendent Ian Parnell, West Midlands Police Solihull NPU – Key Priority Lead: Violence with Injury to under 25's.

Diane Rhoden - Director of Nursing – Quality & Safeguarding - NHS Birmingham and Solihull Clinical Commissioning Group – Key Priority Lead: Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG).

Surjit Balu – Solihull Community Housing, Executive Director Housing & Communities – Key Priority Lead: ASB.

Neil Appleby – Head of Probation, Solihull and North & East Birmingham – Reducing Reoffending Lead.

Cabinet Members in attendance (virtual attendance):

Councillor Mrs A Rolf – Cabinet Member (Stronger & Safer Communities).

Councillor Mrs K Grinsell – Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member (Leisure, Tourism and Sport).

Other Elected Members in attendance by invitation:

None.

**1. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

There were no declarations on interest.

**2. QUESTIONS AND DEPUTATIONS**

There were no questions or deputations.

**3. MINUTES OF THE LAST MEETING**

The Minutes of the last (hybrid) meeting held on 6 January 2022, was submitted for review and approval.

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## RESOLVED

That the Minutes from the meeting held on 6 January 2022, be agreed as a correct record.

### 4. SAFER SOLIHULL PARTNERSHIP

In attendance: Mrs Alison McGrory (Assistant Director – Communities & Partnerships) – Key Priority Lead: Hate Crime; Chief Superintendent Ian Parnell, West Midlands Police Solihull NPU – Key Priority Lead: Violence with Injury to under 25's; Diane Rhoden - Director of Nursing – Quality & Safeguarding - NHS Birmingham and Solihull Clinical Commissioning Group – Key Priority Lead: Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG); Surjit Balu – Solihull Community Housing, Executive Director Housing & Communities – Key Priority Lead: ASB; Neil Appleby – Head of Probation, Solihull and North & East Birmingham – Reducing Reoffending Lead and Gillian Crabbe (Community Safety Lead).

The Board received and considered a number of updates from the Safer Solihull Community Safety Partnership (SSP) in regards to the detail Action Plans to tackle the Partnerships four key priorities.

By way of background, the Board had previously received updates at their September and November 2021 meetings in respect of Hate Crime; Violence with Injury to under 25's; and Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG). For each of those meetings, the Board had raised a number of questions and requested a greater level of detail within the Action Plans pertaining to the specific key deliverables for each priority (and associated target dates) to allow for meaningful future scrutiny against those performance targets to be undertaken.

This meeting sought to address those outstanding issues and now encompassed Anti-Social Behaviour and an update on the Reducing Reoffending Strategy (led by the Probation Service) to give a complete overview of each of the targeted key priorities and achievements to date.

In summary, the following was considered and reviewed:

#### **Partnerships key priority; Violence with Injury to under 25's, for which West Midlands Police was the lead agency:**

The Action Plan highlighted that the Partnership were committed to reducing youth violence across Solihull. The Partnership would adopt a public health approach and there would also be a strong emphasis on intervention and prevention, maximising data, and utilising evidence-based practice. The voice of young people and victims would also inform the Partnerships strategic approach.

Key work-streams were Primary Prevention – preventing individuals from becoming involved in violence by advocating for early years support and maximising early help offering. Secondary Prevention – to lessen the harm and reduce risk from, and to, those already involved in violence. Tertiary Prevention – to lessen the harm and reduce risk by supporting those who had been harmed, and intervene to support them to cope, recover and rebuild. Enforcement and Criminal Justice – working across the system and developing innovative practice to ensure young and vulnerable people were not unnecessarily criminalised using alternative methods of justice; and Attitudinal Change Through Effective Communication – working with communities and Partners to challenge the narrative of violence and empower people to be safe across Solihull.

The Board welcomed the number of reported work-streams and initiatives to tackle this priority as presented by West Midlands Police. The Board also highlighted the establishment of a Young Persons Independent Advisory Group to inform a multi-

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agency approach and asked for further details as to how that would work in practice. Members were advised that it was important to listen to the voice of young people and the establishment of that Group would ensure that young people and youth groups were able to steer and influence future interventions for this priority and re-establish strong communication links.

Members highlighted the recent updates to the expected set-target percentage of positive outcomes for stop and search (an increase from the current WMP performance of 22% to an expected target of 50%) and asked if this would dissuade Police Officers from searching people. West Midlands Police advised that work was being undertaken to strengthen those operational practices and best practice was also being evaluated from police forces elsewhere. The use of an Independent Advisory Group would also contribute to better working practices within the WMP Force Area. Furthermore, work was also being done within schools and colleges to educate young people on police powers to stop and search.

In terms of policing resources, the Board asked if any additional Police Officers had been allocated to the south of the Borough in general (as opposed to only the policing priority areas) and were advised that an additional 15 staff had arrived already from the WMP Uplift Programme.

### **Partnerships key priority: Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG), for which Birmingham and Solihull CCG was the lead agency:**

The Action Plan highlighted that the Partnership believed that Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG), in any form, was a safeguarding priority for Solihull with a vision in which people could live without fear of abuse or violence. The term VAWG covered a range of crimes, with the common theme that they disproportionately affected women and girls. The most recent statistics showed that 1 in 5 women were victims of sexual assault (or attempted assault) in their lifetime.

Whilst it was known that violence against women and girls was a problem, it was difficult to get detailed information on how many women and girls were affected each year. It was widely acknowledged that all strands of violence against women and girls were under-reported, and many survivors did not come to the attention of any support services. That, coupled with lack of awareness of professionals around individual strands, meant that the Partnership did not have robust data; and a major part of the work over the next 3 years was to boost reporting across each priority area and work with Partner agencies to gather that information.

No single agency was responsible for the priority of ending violence against women and girls. Working in partnership, across all agencies and the community, would ensure that the Partnership could obtain the best possible outcomes for victim/survivors in Solihull.

In terms of the presented data within the report, the Board questioned if the increase in numbers was attributable to a genuine increase in that crime type or greater victim awareness leading to greater levels of reporting. The Board was advised that it was perceived to be the latter of those scenarios.

Members also enquired of the likelihood of women and girls being repeat victims and were advised that there was evidence of that being a reality in some cases, particularly domestic abuse. Members also acknowledged the reported rises in domestic abuse and the likelihood that this was attributable to greater (and ease of) reporting. The duties and responsibilities brought in by the Domestic Violence Bill 2020 (and Act 2021) were also discussed and acknowledged which would help transform the response to domestic abuse and ensure victims had the support they needed.

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The Board welcomed the targeted educational interventions for schools of which a pilot was currently being undertaken. Subject to the evaluation and success of that, those interventions would be rolled out more widely within schools.

Members also welcomed many of the individual interventions to support this priority, such as the World Café, targeted social media awareness campaigns and proactive work within the Boroughs Town Centres to support the night-time economy. In respect of the latter, the Board also highlighted the value that the Taxi Marshall's scheme had added in keeping night-time patrons and visitors safe and asked if the scheme should now be reintroduced. Officers advised that the scheme had now been recommissioned and was operational, albeit on a limited number of targeted nights at the present time. The scheme would be kept under review, going forwards, and the principle of the initiative was also supported by West Midlands Police.

### **Partnerships key priority; Hate Crime, for which Solihull MBC was the lead agency:**

The Action Plan highlighted that the term 'hate crime' could be used to describe a range of criminal behaviour where the perpetrator was motivated by hostility or demonstrated hostility towards the victim's disability, race, religion, sexual orientation or transgender identity (i.e. protected characteristics).

Any hate crime could include verbal abuse, intimidation, threats, harassment, assault, and bullying, as well as damage to property. Hate crime was currently considered as a more hidden crime due to the volume of under-reporting to third party sectors and the Police.

Hate crime had been a feature in reported crime across Solihull for many years. The numbers had fluctuated over time and were also sometimes influenced by other key local, national or worldwide events.

The Board noted that Solihull MBC had pledged to resettle families via the Afghan Resettlement Schemes and, in addition, was supporting the resettlement of 200 families from Hong Kong. Voluntary and community support was a key part of those local plans. Members asked how that was being achieved in practice and were advised that, whilst exact numbers were ever-changing, the situation had been managed by the use of bridging hotels for Afghan refugees pending permanent resettlement within other parts of the country. For the Hong Kong families, large numbers were settling in Solihull and were either finding their own private accommodation (to buy) or securing rented accommodation in the private sector. The main pressure on the local authority for those families was around the provision of education and access to local services.

In terms of the reported hate crimes, the Board sought further information as to what the breakdown of that reporting was and if there were any emerging trends and triggers to aid targeted interventions. West Midlands Police advised that the majority of hate crimes were committed online which caused operational challenges to police investigations and the collection of evidence. Confidence in reporting was key and further work was ongoing to inspire and maintain that public confidence and trust.

### **Partnerships key priority; Anti-Social Behaviour (ASB), for which Solihull Community Housing (SCH) was the lead agency:**

The Action Plan highlighted that Solihull Community Housing provided a tenure-neutral Anti-Social Behaviour (ASB) service on behalf of Solihull MBC. That service worked closely with key Partners and Agencies, along with registered social housing providers and private sector landlords within Solihull. The challenges arising from dealing with ASB and achieving positive outcomes could be complex. In Solihull, a multi-agency approach was adopted to tackling ASB, which was one of the priority themes identified through the work of the Partnership.

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To support the effective delivery of the ASB service, both “Place and People” based approaches had been adopted. The approach to ASB through Locality Working involved local Members, Agencies, and Partners and directly feed into the Thriving Communities Board.

Within SCH, the approach to delivering effective ASB services was led through the Executive Director of Housing and Communities. Much work had already been carried out in reviewing the service delivery model jointly with Solihull MBC. The aim of that work being to establish the optimum service delivery model taking into account and addressing tactical, system and cultural factors associated with ASB. Work was already underway at SCH to review the current service delivery model, that being part of a wider consideration to restructure its own Neighbourhood Services Team to enhance local knowledge. The work being delivered through SCH, other Agencies and the Partnership itself would inform the strategic approach to ASB within Solihull.

In welcoming the contents of the report, the Board perceived that there were some irregularities between the ASB working practices within SCH and the statutory noise complaint functions that a local authority was expected to deliver. SCH advised that the issues raised were the subject of live conversations at present within SCH (and the Council’s Regulatory Team) to help review working practices, improve evidence collection and enhance staff training and local expertise to engage the statutory processes, where appropriate, at the correct time.

The number of legal actions taken against non-SCH tenants for statutory noise nuisance complaints was reported as being very few over the last 36 months although there had been some high-profile cases over the course of the last 12 month period. The Board considered that the low number of statutory noise legal actions was disappointing, noting that other joint and direct actions with the Police, such as ASB interventions and a number of Closure Orders, had still taken place.

### **Reducing Reoffending Strategy, for which the Probation Service, (Solihull and North & East Birmingham) was the lead agency:**

The report highlighted that Community Safety Partnerships had a statutory responsibility under the Policing and Crime Act 2009 to develop a strategic approach to reducing reoffending. Whilst Solihull had a positive tradition of multi-agency work in that area, it had not, in recent years, had a formal strategy to articulate that approach. Typically, such strategies focused on recognised ‘pathways’ for reducing reoffending, including accommodation, substance misuse and education, training and employment, building routes into practical interventions that could reduce repeat crimes.

The Safer Solihull Board had now nominated Neil Appleby, as Head of Probation, to lead on the development of the strategy, with support from Chief Inspector Johnson of West Midlands Police. They were in the process of carrying out an interventions gap analysis and convening a multi-agency group to establish priorities, in terms of developing and co-ordinating key interventions. An additional function for that Group would be to provide local governance for Integrated Offender Management (IOM) in the Borough.

Commencement of work on the Reducing Reoffending Strategy had been delayed owing to a significant reorganisation of probation services, principally a unification under a single ‘Probation Service’ after the Government’s ‘Transforming Rehabilitation’ reform had previously created a range of probation providers in 2014. The unified structure had been put in place in Solihull on 10 January 2022 and the Partnership was now able to progress with a range of initiatives including the Reducing Reoffending Strategy. The Reducing Reoffending Board would convene, for the first time, in the latter part of February 2022 with a view to producing a draft strategy by September 2022.

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The Board welcomed the work-streams that were underway and looked forward to considering further updates on the development and adoption of the Reducing Reoffending Strategy.

**RESOLVED**

That, subject to the comments and views recorded in the preamble above, the Board **UNANIMOUSLY** made the following **RECOMMENDATIONS** to the **Safer Solihull Partnership** and the **Cabinet Portfolio Holder for Stronger & Safer Communities**:

- (i) That, the Board notes and welcomes the detailed updates on the work completed thus far for the Partnership's key priorities and associated action plans; and
- (ii) That, the Board receives a further detailed progress update in December 2022, as part of its 2022/23 Work Programme in its capacity as the Council's Statutory "Crime and Disorder Scrutiny Committee".

(The meeting ended at 7.30pm)