



Communities
Overview Committee

18 March 2019

2.00 pm

Item
Public

**MINUTES OF THE COMMUNITIES OVERVIEW COMMITTEE MEETING HELD ON 18
MARCH 2019
2.00 PM – 4.00 PM**

Responsible Officer: Amanda Holyoak
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Present

Councillor Cecilia Motley (Chairman)
Councillors Nick Hignett (Vice Chairman), Ted Clarke, Rob Gittins, Nigel Hartin,
Vivienne Parry, Keith Roberts, Leslie Winwood and Tina Woodward

42 Apologies for absence and substitutions

Councillor R Hughes

43 Disclosable Pecuniary Interests

None were declared.

44 Minutes of the Last Meeting

Members noted that the minutes of the meeting held on 4 February 2019 would be presented at the next meeting for approval.

45 Public Question Time

There were no public questions.

46 Member Question Time

There were no Member questions.

47 Community Safety Strategy

The Chair welcomed Andrew Gough, Safer Communities Team to the meeting who had been invited to attend the meeting to provide an update on emerging crime trends and highlight priorities going forward.

Members were reminded that the Crime Reduction, Community Safety and Drug and Alcohol Strategy was produced every three years by the Shropshire Community Safety Partnership. The current Strategy covered the period 2017 – 2020.

During the Committee's consideration of whether the Strategy was effective, Members asked questions including:

- What data did the strategy use to determine its priorities - the figures for reoffending in the Strategy were only as recent as March 2017.
- How often were the priorities reviewed?
- Why was arson not featured as a priority for the Partnership?
- Was it possible to show that reduction in support services be linked to a rise in offending and re-offending, and whether a reduction in youth services had led to more youth offending?
- Was support available to those experiencing domestic abuse who were not able to speak English?
- Was there a consistent level of rural crime and was it recognised that fear of crime in rural areas was an issue with many isolated and elderly people living alone and feeling vulnerable.
- Were there any figures on incidents of doorstep salespeople or fraudsters targeting vulnerable people?
- Was knife crime a particular problem in Shropshire?

In response, Mr Gough and his colleague explained that the period of time to record a reoffence was 12 months, and figures then took six months for the Ministry of Justice to validate. The Ministry of Justice had however changed the definition of reoffending in 2015 resulting in difficulty making comparisons but that nationally a greater proportion of prolific offenders were involved with community rehabilitation services.

The Priorities were reviewed as necessary as the Partnership recognised that during the lifetime of the Strategy issues might change and different concerns surface. It used data, as well as information and community based reports to ensure it maintained a good understanding of the issues to be addressed.

Arson was not currently prevalent enough to be featured as a priority although members noted that just one arsonist was enough to influence figures greatly.

It was very difficult to demonstrate a clear correlation between support services and reoffending as there was such a mix of support from a variety of different sources including the local authority, police, and voluntary services.

A refuge and outreach service was provided by the Council for domestic abuse and a translation service was available.

Much crime within Shropshire was defined as rural due to the nature of the county. The purchase of CCTV equipment was a good deterrent. Funding had been made available through the Police and Crime Commissioner which had helped Town and Parish Councils to purchase and update CCTV equipment.

In terms of doorstep crime and fraud, reports came through the Public Protection Team in relation to rogue traders, hawkers and harassment on the doorstep. Locality based

promotional events had been run the Public Protection Team and it was hoped to identify different types of crime or incidents and identify and prevent nuisance where it occurred.

The Committee thanked officers for the report and asked for a further update in a year's time to understand if there was a need for any change in priorities once new data was available. The Members also asked to see a draft of the new three year strategy before it was finalised and it was agreed that this should be built into the Committee's work programme.

48 Public Rights of Way

The Chair welcomed Shona Butter, Mapping and Enforcement Manager and Clare Fildes, Interim Head of Culture and Leisure to the meeting. The Committee had asked them to attend and present a report so that it could understand whether the Council had an effective process in place to ensure good maintenance of the public rights of way for which it was responsible.

Members heard that Shropshire had the third largest public rights of way network in the county at over 5,600 km. It had a statutory duty to protect and assert the network and to keep the Definitive Map and Statement under review for the entire network.

Officers explained the policies in place for the public rights of way management, which were included within the Shropshire Great Outdoors Strategy 2018 – 2028. Members noted the particular complexities of managing rights of way than more often than not ran across private land involving several different land owners.

The report set out key facts and figures relating to achievements, current issues and the Rights of Way budget. The Outdoor Partnerships Team were facing a £100,000 budget cut in 2019/20 due to the withdrawal of Public Health funding. This would be met by voluntary redundancy and ceasing to run the Shropshire Wilds Teams unless external funding could be secured. In addition, a £50,000 budget cut in 2019/20 was specifically targeted at public rights of way. Outdoor partnerships had already had a 58% cut in total budget since 2012/13 resulting in the accessibility of the Rights of Way network falling from 85% to 66% in 2018/19.

The teams were currently generating £148,000, which was contributing to staff and maintenance costs. Members heard that were around £1 million of capital works required for the maintenance of bridges and other infrastructure and a similar sum could easily be required if the council was required to respond to notices served.

The report also outlined future pressures and how the team worked successfully with very little funding through careful budget management, volunteer co-ordination, relationship building and income generation. The Team continued to explore the most efficient and effective way of managing the network.

Responding to questions from the Committee, officers explained:

- The duties of the Council in providing rights of way furniture
- How enforcement issues were dealt with on an individual basis which could be very time consuming. It was hoped to publish 1:10,000 scale maps with descriptions which would make the enforcement role easier
- How rights of way diversions were a way of generating income

- How the introduction of the Deregulation Act 2015 and cut-off date of 2026 had significant implications for claims based on historic evidence when there was already a backlog of 74 Formal applications and over 100 potential claims as a result of the Discovering Lost Ways Project
- The Council was only responsible for surfaces of rights of way.
- It was not possible to respond to enquiries within 10 days, there were over 1000 enquiries received annually and 1500 complaints.
- The team worked to raise as much income as possible to remove reliance on Council funding and had increased income from £30,000 in 2012/12 to £500,000 in 2018/19. However this had not made up for the budget halving during this period of time.
- The work of P3 teams was extremely valuable but it was getting to the point that support to volunteer groups would not be adequate

Members expressed concern about the pressures on the team and the perception of the Council in relation to these issues. The Committee asked if the 66% of Rights of Way availability was likely to drop further and heard that the Council was supposed to conduct another survey of the network this year but did not have the staff to do this. Members were concerned that this was a failure of the Council's statutory duty.

Members referred to the need to build local economies, improve the tourism offer and attract more people into the county. It appeared that the rights of way network was in peril and would impact greatly on these efforts. This also appeared to be detrimental to encouragement of healthy lifestyles and exercise to tackle obesity, mental health and other health conditions.

The Interim Head of Culture and Leisure warned against increasing budgets for rights of way at the cost of other cultural and heritage assets in the county.

The Committee thanked officers for attending the meeting and paid tribute to the efforts of the team in doing as much as they could with the resources available.

Members agreed that a report should be formulated for Cabinet highlighting the Committee's significant concerns and highlighting how budgetary cuts to the team meant it was unable to deliver statutory requirements and appeared to be contrary to the objectives of attracting more people into the county and encouraging healthy lifestyles.

49 Work Programme

The Chair reported that the Committee had been asked to consider setting up a Task and Finish Group on Youth Work to conduct a deep dive into issues around youth provision such as where it was available and where not, barriers to access, the dangers of vulnerable young people getting involved in anti-social behaviour and crime.

The Committee agreed to commission this work and the draft terms of reference were approved.

The Scrutiny Officer reported that the Community Transport Task and Finish Group would continue its work on an ad hoc basis and was keeping a watching brief in relation to impending strategy change and all aspects of passenger transport.