

SOUTH CAMBRIDGESHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

REPORT TO: Leader and Cabinet 12 October 2006
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NEIGHBOURHOOD POLICING PANELS

Purpose

1. This report provides an update on the development of Neighbourhood Panels since the beginning of 2006 and sets out proposed terms of reference for the Panels with a timetable for their introduction across the district.

Executive Summary

2. The first Neighbourhood Panel is now well established and a second one has been successfully started. The format adopted in South Cambs is different from those proposed in other authority areas, but appears to suit local circumstances; this will need to be kept under review, in the light of developing experience here and across Cambridgeshire.
3. The report recommends support for terms of reference that reflect the current arrangements, with a review in 12 months time; the final decision on terms of reference can only be made in partnership with the police, who remain the lead agency for Neighbourhood Policing/Panels. A programme for rolling out the remaining panels to cover the other three policing Neighbourhoods is set out for cabinet endorsement. The report recommends that a lead officer for the Council is sought for each panel, to work with the police to support and implement neighbourhood community safety.

Background

4. The Neighbourhood Policing initiative was set out in a report to cabinet on 8 December 2005, as well as in a presentation by the Chief Constable to Council at the start of 2006. This initiative is part of the drive towards citizen focussed policing, building stronger communities who are actively engaged in community safety.
5. Southern Division of Cambridgeshire Constabulary has been designated the Pathfinder area for the force, including the areas of this Council with East Cambs and Cambridge City. Due to our positive engagement with the police on this initiative, South Cambs has been helping lead the implementation in Cambridgeshire during 2006.
6. In line with the approach agreed in December 2005, a pilot Neighbourhood Panel has been established in the Histon neighbourhood. It should be noted that the terminology of 'Neighbourhood Panel' has been used rather than 'Community Panel', which was referred to in the earlier report. This report is being considered somewhat later than envisaged last year, due to workloads, and more panel meetings have taken place; this however provides a stronger basis for this review.

Considerations

7. Three panel meetings have taken place in Histon, covering the wards of Histon/Impington, Milton, Cottenham/Oakington and Waterbeach/Landbeach; they were held on 23 February, 16 May and 18 July. All meetings have been open to all, in line with the views of Cabinet last December. There was a good level of attendance at the first and third meetings, with members of the public and Parish and District Councillors representing most of the villages, along with representatives from a number of agencies. The second meeting was smaller, and lessons have been learnt about the publicity needed to ensure people are aware of these meetings.
8. Each meeting has considered a police report on recent data covering crime and antisocial behaviour in the neighbourhood, with a larger profile presented at the first meeting. There is then an opportunity for all present to comment, and to add their own experience to add to the data and the suggested priority issues to be tackled. In the majority of cases residents' perceptions match those of the police, though there have been others when different issues have emerged.
9. Each meeting has then prioritised three issues for action in the subsequent two/three months. The priority issues have been:

Issues	a	b	c
Feb	Youth drug and alcohol misuse across the neighbourhood	Crime and disorder in Milton at Tesco's site and the Rowans and Sycamores Estate	Cycle thefts, damage to vehicles and traffic problems associated with Waterbeach railway station
May	Youth drug and alcohol misuse across the neighbourhood	Speeding – mainly on Cambridge commuter routes	High visibility policing focussing on antisocial behaviour hotspots
July	Speeding, targeting a set of identified roads across the neighbourhood	Antisocial behaviour in Cottenham	Crime and disorder in Milton, mainly at the Science Park, Froment Way and Humphreys Way

In the July meeting it was agreed that all agencies also needed to remain focussed on youth drug and alcohol misuse as a continuing issue

10. The subsequent meetings have included a report-back on the actions undertaken to address the priorities set at the previous meeting, and an assessment of their success in dealing with the issue. The majority of the actions have been for the police, but not all; the issues at Waterbeach railway station involved a number of agencies in taking some successful steps to improve the situation. The issue of widening actions beyond the police is considered later in this report.
11. The format for undertaking the prioritisation has changed since the initial meeting. In February a number of representatives of both the public and Councillors were nominated to sit on a smaller Panel; this process involved asking individuals in each ward to put themselves forward. This Panel then selected the priorities, with the remaining people in the meeting as an audience.
12. Both the nomination process and the subsequent 'meeting within a meeting' proved awkward. In May there were smaller numbers attending and this process was clearly inappropriate. It was therefore decided to seek the views of the whole meeting to

decide the priorities, and this process seemed to work better. At an officer follow-up meeting between the police and the council, it was agreed to formalise the process of allowing everyone to 'vote' by placing three stickers on their preferred priorities.

13. At the July meeting, which was well attended, this process of voting was adopted. The suggested priorities from both the public and those based on police data were written up on sheets and everyone was then able to place three stickers on their preferred priorities. This process worked well. It has subsequently been adopted in the first Neighbourhood Panel for the Sawston area, where it also worked well, providing a straightforward and transparent way for the meeting to select the issues of most concern.
14. The Sawston neighbourhood, including the wards of the Abingtons, Duxford, the Shelfords and Stapleford as well as Sawston, was selected as the second area after discussions with the police and support from local Councillors. After a first meeting in the area covered by the Sergeant at Histon, it was important to move to an area covered by the Sergeant based at Sawston.
15. For information, the three current priorities selected at Sawston are:
 - a) Alcohol-related crime and disorder problems in High Street, Sawston.
 - b) Youth antisocial behaviour in Great Abington.
 - c) Speeding throughout the neighbourhood, focussed on locations identified in the meeting.
16. There appears to have been significant impact on the issues highlighted as priorities. In subsequent meetings the priorities have often changed to reflect this, though some issues have needed further work and remained priorities.
17. At present the priorities have generally been matters for police action, but this is something that will need further consideration over time. The purpose of the Neighbourhood Panels is to improve community safety through active involvement, and while this involvement is starting with selecting local policing priorities, and then monitoring performance, it need not be confined to this role. Indeed, to realise greater involvement will over time require more active contributions from the public and possibly other agencies, to strengthen community safety.
18. In some areas, for example East Cambs, the proposed focus of Neighbourhood Panels has been drawn more widely than that of neighbourhood policing. We understand that they intend to focus on issues of 'neighbourhood management', which will involve the roles of a much larger number of agencies who contribute to community safety. It will be interesting to watch how this approach works out in practice, and to consider any lessons that could be relevant to South Cambs.
19. In the light of the preceding issues, draft terms of reference have been drawn up, and these are included as an appendix. The cabinet is asked to consider and endorse these terms of reference, subject to a review in 12 months time. This review will need to take account of developing experience here, in the rest of Cambridgeshire, and nationally. It is expected that this experience could lead to further definition and reshaping of Neighbourhood Policing and/or Neighbourhood Management and the nature and operation of Neighbourhood Panels.
20. A programme is needed for rolling out the Neighbourhood Panels to the other three policing neighbourhoods in the district. Our experience of a phased approach has worked well, and officers recommend that this should be continued, albeit at a slightly

faster pace. It is suggested that all the panels would be operating by Summer 2007, as the areas without panels may increasingly feel themselves to be 'left out'. However, this has to be balanced with the increasing resource requirements as each new panel is set up: its support has to be added to that of the existing panels, which will continue to meet.

21. Initially it was agreed that there should be 5 panel meetings per year in each area. However, with 5 neighbourhoods this would mean 25 public meetings per year need to be resourced, which looks demanding and may prove ambitious. The proposed terms of reference would allow for the meetings to reduce to quarterly, reducing the total meetings to 20 per year; it is felt that this should still be frequent enough to be able to respond to changing local priorities, without being too frequent to increase risks of some 'burn-out' of interest.
22. One issue raised in the Histon neighbourhood has been the location of the meetings. To date they have all been in Histon, reflecting the pragmatic name of the panel due to its policing based on the local station in Histon. However, it has now been agreed that the venue should move around the neighbourhood, to reflect the diversity of the area and to encourage greater participation in other villages when the meeting is held in their local venue. It is suggested that this issue is considered in each neighbourhood, and that all may wish to try a rotating venue. The effects of this can be considered in the review in 2007.
23. It is suggested that the first Panel for the third area is set up in November 2006. The fourth could start in around March '07, with the last set up in June '07. The three remaining areas will be based on the police stations in Cambourne, Melbourn and Linton, and are expected to be termed the Neighbourhood Panels for these named places, although covering a considerable number of wards. It has been suggested that Cambourne should be the next panel, to reflect some recent concerns about antisocial behaviour.
24. The principal staffing support for the meetings has to date been from the police Community Engagement Manager and the Sector Inspector, with the Head of Community Services and the Community Safety Officer on behalf of the council. Other officers from both the police and the council have attended, both to support the meetings and to learn about the process. However, as the numbers of panel meetings increase, resources from both organisations will become somewhat more stretched.
25. The three current lead officers are likely to continue to set up the first meetings in each neighbourhood, and may attend some meetings thereafter. However, it will be necessary for the local police team, led by the area Sergeants and Community Beat Managers to take a more leading role in established panel meetings. Similarly, the lead for the council will need to draw in other appropriate officers.
26. Presuming the Head of Community Services and the Community Safety Officer each continues to provide a lead for one Neighbourhood Panel, three other council officers will need to be identified to take this role in the other three areas. It is suggested that officers in services with contact with issues of crime and antisocial behaviour, including housing and environmental health, may be considered. However, no detailed discussions have yet taken place, and member's views on this are sought.

Legal	Our work on Neighbourhood Panels helps us fulfil our statutory duties under Section 17 of the Crime and Disorder Act 1998
Staffing	Dealt with in paras 24 to 26 of the report. Supporting Neighbourhood Policing will require some increased staff input.
Risk Management	None
Equal Opportunities	Venues that are accessible to all sections of the community are used. It may be appropriate to specifically invite members of any minority communities to panel meetings in appropriate areas.

Consultations

27. The annual consultation meeting of the South Cambs Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnership was held on 20 September, and was focussed on 'Policing your Neighbourhood'. Invites went out to every parish council and a range of other agencies and there were about 70 people at the meeting. After a presentation on neighbourhood policing, a set of workshops were run in which participants took part mock panels, to show how they work. There was some very positive feedback about the panels and the overall process of neighbourhood policing.

Effect on Annual Priorities and Corporate Objectives

28.	Affordable Homes	None
	Customer Service	Direct engagement with the public, in which they set local priorities, considerably enhances customer service
	Northstowe and other growth areas	None
	Quality, Accessible Services	The process set out in this report increases the accessibility and transparency of local services
	Village Life	Enhancing community safety meets one of the highest priorities of local residents
	Sustainability	None
	Partnership	This work is founded on strong partnership working between the council and the police

Conclusions/Summary

29. The pilot Neighbourhood Panel based on Histon has been a success. The format of the meetings and the operation of the prioritisation within the meeting have changed in the light of experience, with the whole public meeting forming the 'panel'. This has proved quite manageable, with a voting system based on stickers given to each participant. This format is significantly different from that being adopted elsewhere, but it appears to suit the local situation in South Cambs; the first meeting of the Sawston Panel has also found this a successful way to operate. Flexibility may be required to reflect developing experience, both here and elsewhere, with a review needed in 12 months time.
30. The programme for establishing the remaining three panels should follow the phased approach that has been developed. The next panel should be set up in November, with another around March and the last on June 2007. The workload of arranging and supporting the meetings falls on the police working with the council. Officers will need to be identified to take on the leading role for the council, to work with police leads.

31. The terms of reference reflect the current focus on neighbourhood policing, with public involvement in the decision-making and monitoring of priorities. Over time this focus may expand to include wider involvement of the public and other agencies in more directly contributing to action to increase community safety as part of the agreed priorities for neighbourhoods.

Recommendations

32. The Cabinet is recommended to:
- (a) Endorse the draft Terms of Reference in the Appendix
 - (b) Approve the programme for setting up the remaining three panels, in around November 06, March and June 07, with a proposal for Cambourne to be the next panel
 - (c) Seek lead council officers to work with the police leads, once each panel is established
 - (d) Review neighbourhood policing and neighbourhood panels in Autumn 2007.

Background Papers: the following background papers were used in the preparation of this report:

Report to cabinet in December 2005 entitled Neighbourhood Policing
Minutes of the Histon Panel meeting held on 23 February 06
Histon Neighbourhood Policing Team Newsletter of August 2006
Minutes of the Sawston Neighbourhood Panel on 11 September 06

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