

SOUTH CAMBRIDGESHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

REPORT TO: Leader and Cabinet

8 December 2005

AUTHOR/S: Chief Executive

NEIGHBOURHOOD POLICING

Purpose

1. This report sets out a proposal for the Council to work in partnership with the police in their implementation of Neighbourhood Policing in the district, and the establishment of Community Panels.

Effect on Corporate Objectives

2. Quality, Accessible Services	Neighbourhood policing will enable the local priorities of residents to be reflected in local policing.
Village Life	Enhanced feelings of security will support village life.
Sustainability	
Partnership	The establishment of a partnership between the Council and the police will benefit residents, as well as both organisations and help deliver the Community Strategy.

Background

3. Policing in Britain is changing, in response to the government's drive towards citizen focussed services.

“In order to be effective, the police need to be able to perform their duties with the active co-operation, not just consent, of local communities. Focused local policing, with a community which is genuinely engaged, is essential to fighting crime and building a stronger society. A community that feels it is part of the solution can work successfully with its local policing team to play a real part in reducing crime and anti-social behaviour. That is why the Government is committed to providing effective, accessible neighbourhood policing to deliver increased confidence and security.”

From Building Communities, Beating Crime: A better police service for the 21st century.

4. Citizen Focussed policing seeks to put the citizen at the centre of service delivery. Working with citizens not just for them, it will ensure they have a real say in how their area is policed and the priorities that should be addressed. In that way they may be encouraged to move from 'passive' customers of services to being actively engaged in them.
5. The aim of building stronger communities, which are actively engaged in developing community safety, is in line with the Community Strategy for South Cambs. Members will recall that both the Police and the Council are 'signed up' partners to the community strategy, and this new initiative is a real opportunity to progress our aims.
6. Across England and Wales each Constabulary has selected a Pathfinder area for the introduction of Neighbourhood Policing; in Cambridgeshire, Southern Division has been selected as the pathfinder area. Both Council and Police officers attended a recent

conference to compare progress in East Anglia, and the conclusions from this joint work are being applied in the proposals in this report.

7. The pilot implementation has been under development for some months and the division needs to maintain its pathfinder momentum. Internal structural changes have been made and the proposals for these have been reported to council officers. It is now timely to implement engagement processes. All police forces are required to fully implement this approach in all areas the country by 2008.

Considerations

8. Southern Division has been divided into a set of eleven 'neighbourhood' groups based on government guidance, taking into account crime and incident figures. The five neighbourhoods in south Cambs are effectively sub-areas of the district; division into smaller areas is not feasible within the available police or council resources. A plan showing the neighbourhoods is contained in the attached **appendix**.
9. The boundaries of the five neighbourhoods have been aligned with electoral wards, to allow representation, and these neighbourhoods have been published by the police. Council officers suggested that boundaries aligned with village college catchment areas would have had merit, but accept that any basis of divisions could be challenged. In view of the need to make progress, the pragmatic position is to proceed with the boundaries shown in the appendix, and to review these boundaries if they prove problematic in terms of community engagement.
10. A key component of neighbourhood policing is the establishment of a Community Panel for each area. The panel will provide the community's means of engagement on policing priorities and performance, with regular meetings to consider the issues and the policing response. They will not be Local Consultation Groups (LCGs) under a new name. They will be a new way of working acknowledging the very different needs of local communities and providing accountability in performance. At each meeting the panel will be able to set or review local policing priorities and receive reports on how well the police have performed in delivering these priorities; it has been suggested that up to three priorities should prove manageable.
11. The panel will also be able to consider what other steps can be taken by the wider community, for example through neighbourhood watch groups or other agencies like parish councils, to help improve community safety. The South Cambs Strategic Partnership may have views on the term of reference of the panels, and particularly whether they may widen their scope to consider related issues, such as concerning children and young people, or health aspects of community safety. We understand that in Cambridge City discussions are taking place as to how panels may be aligned to the council's existing area committees, but there may be a need to have separate meetings due to the size of the agenda.
12. It is proposed that the membership of the panels should consist of:
 - a) Independent chairman
 - b) Up to six District Councillors, including one for each multi-member ward and some from single-member wards within the neighbourhood
 - c) One County Councillor
 - d) A member of the Police Authority
 - e) A Police representative, either the Sector Inspector or Community Sergeant
 - f) An SCDC officer
 - g) Neighbourhood Watch/Countryside Watch representative(s)

- h) Possibly other nominated or elected lay people to represent key interests

East Cambridgeshire has considered the election of some representatives at an annual neighbourhood forum meeting.

- 13. The Police Partnership Development Manager has been working with the Sector Inspector in developing the current proposals, in negotiation with council officers. He may continue to be involved with the early panel meetings, helping to ensure that the implementation achieves the desired objectives.

Options

- 14. The options are confined to the way that Neighbourhood Policing is implemented, as the requirement to move to this form of policing has been proposed by the Association of Chief Police Officers and supported by the Home Office.
- 15. One possibility could be to roll out the Community Panels across the district at the same time. This would have the benefit of providing the same service to all areas from the start. The disadvantage of such an approach would be the inability to learn from a pilot to help ensure as smooth a process as possible, given that this is a very major change in approach. Resourcing a one-off process would also present considerable challenges.
- 16. These are options about the transparency of the Community Panels. The meetings could be: closed meetings, with the public not permitted to attend; meetings open to the public to attend as observers; or open to public questions at the start of the meeting, with the public able to observe for the rest of the meeting.
- 17. The frequency of the panel meetings will need to be decided, balancing the need to be sufficiently frequent to provide effective community input, with the ability to resource the meetings. Monthly meetings, which would be the most responsive option, would mean 60 meetings a year and this is quite unsustainable. It is anticipated that initially 5 meetings of each panel per year will be the right balance; once panels are established this may reduce to quarterly meetings.

Financial Implications

- 18. The police will be resourcing Neighbourhood Policing and the establishment of community panel meetings.

Legal Implications

- 19. The Council have a duty, under Section 17 of the Crime and Disorder Act, to consider the community safety implications of any service development or initiative. This report addresses community safety very directly, by involving local communities in consideration of policing priorities and monitoring performance. The implementation of neighbourhood policing will be overseen by the statutory Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnership, which is currently chaired by a South Cambs Member.

Staffing Implications

- 20. Panel meetings will require the attendance of a senior council officer, at least initially; this can be reviewed after the first few meetings. The Head of Community Services, as lead officer on community safety, would expect to attend the pilot panel in Histon during 2006 in order to assess what support is likely to be required longer-term.

Risk Management Implications

21. None.

Consultations

22. This report has been drawn up in consultation with the police. It is being taken to the South Cambs Strategic Partnership (often referred to as the LSP) before the Cabinet meeting, in order to consult all the relevant partners and seek their support. The views from their meeting on 30 November will be reported orally to cabinet.

Conclusions/Summary

23. Neighbourhood Policing represents a major change in approach to policing, engaging communities in drawing up priorities in local areas, and working with partners to monitor delivery. The community panels will provide a set of local forums in which to consider community safety issues. The development of the panels' role will continue over the first year
24. Piloting the roll-out of this new approach will enable us to learn from the experience in one area, and to apply this over the remainder of 2006. The initial panel meetings should be as 'transparent' as possible, to engender confidence in the process, with public questions at the start and the public able to stay as observers. The merits of this form of meeting can be weighed after the first two meetings, for application as appropriate in the panel meetings for the other neighbourhoods.
25. The Histon/Milton/Cottenham/Waterbeach area is the most advanced in terms of the preparations for the community panels, with discussions that have already taken place with some ward members. It is proposed that this area should be used as a pilot, with the first meeting of the panel in January or February 2005. Any lessons learnt or developments in the Histon area can be applied to the other four areas, which can be implemented in mid 2006.

Recommendations

26. It is recommended that:
- a) The Council works in partnership with Cambridgeshire Constabulary to establish a pilot Community Panel from around January 2006 in the Histon area, and
 - b) Following an evaluation of the pilot above after the first two Panel meetings, terms of reference are drawn up for Community Panels, and they are established across the district during 2006.

Background Papers: the following background papers were used in the preparation of this report:
Neighbourhood Policing Pathfinder BCU and partner Workbook
South Cambridgeshire Sector Newsletter, August 2005
Notes of a meeting held on 2 August 05 between Police and Council representatives
East Cambs LSP Report: Neighbourhood Consultation Panels

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