

Monmouthshire Select Committee Minutes

Meeting of Public Services Scrutiny Committee held at County Hall, Usk - Remote Attendance on Monday, 10th October, 2022 at 2.00 pm

Councillors Present

County Councillor Armand Watts (Chairman)
County Councillor Penny Jones (Vice Chairman)

County Councillors: Jill Bond, Jan Butler,
Steven Garratt, Malcolm Lane, Dale Rooke and
Frances Taylor

Officers in Attendance

Hazel Ilett, Scrutiny Manager
Robert McGowan, Policy and Scrutiny Officer
Sharran Lloyd, LSB Development Manager
Matthew Gatehouse, Head of Policy and
Governance
Andrew Mason, Project Officer ASB
John Crandon, Community Safety Officer
John Davies, Chief Inspector

APOLOGIES: None

1. Declarations of Interest

None.

2. Public Open Forum

No submissions were received.

3. Crime and Disorder Scrutiny Responsibilities

Hazel Ilett delivered the presentation.

4. Community Safety in Monmouthshire

Chief Inspector John Davies gave a brief overview of his role and Safer Monmouthshire. Sharran Lloyd, Andrew Mason and John Crandon delivered the presentation and answered the members' questions with the Chief Inspector.

Challenge:

Regarding crime recording, those are Home Office categories? But there is no overall Home Office category for domestic abuse – they are mostly recorded under 'Violence With/Without Injury'?

A sexual offence would still be that, though considered as domestic abuse-related: a substantive offence in a domestic setting with two co-habiting adults over 18 would be tagged as a domestic abuse incident. It is a domestic abuse 'tag' which is part of HO statistics that links it to being a domestic abuse crime. A domestic-related incident could involve a number of

different strands, which is why they are the primary crime, then tagged with the domestic abuse part of it.

Per head of population, incidences of rape and other sexual offences are the second highest in Gwent?

Yes, Monmouthshire is the second highest, despite our relatively low population. It could be that people are more confident in reporting here, compared to some of the other authorities.

When talking about concentrations of domestic abuse and violence, there is reference to socio-economic factors. However, incidences in Mill (Magor West) are higher than in Dewstow, and Mill doesn't have particular issues in socio-economic terms.

Socio-economic reasons for domestic abuse have been pointed to over the years but we have seen a huge amount of under-reporting in areas where socio-economic issues haven't been particularly stark. This is important for us to note as our work progresses. We are one of the few boards at this level that's taking it so seriously.

Will implementation of a 20mph speed limit be scrutinised by the Community Safety Partnership?

We are setting up a road safety traffic group to look at this in more detail, so hopefully we will have more to say on that in the future.

The reason for apathy in reporting is clear: so many feel that it isn't worth calling the police, as they don't believe that their call will be followed up, or that anything will be done. This is one of the main things that needs to be addressed.

Placement of resources is done on basis of threat and risk. Dedicated neighbourhood resources...When we look at the threat and risk, we have come out of Covid into a different landscape, including things like placement of people into hotels....These are things we have to learn to react to. Through the Partnership arrangements we are trying to have more joined up thinking....cause and effect of that decision needs to be understood...might end up being offenders. They often go into those locations and end up as victims...Our new partnership arrangements are to ensure that we are more joined up in our decision-making.

We do have issues about people being able to contact us....There is a massive piece around reassurance, where we aren't communicating the positives as much as we should be....sits within the sub groups...hopefully reassurance that we...dedicated comms officer to work on partnership messaging – not just police messaging, the whole partnership deals with the issue.

We have had problems with anti-social behaviour in Chepstow. Part of the problem is the hotel used to house the homeless as part of the Covid measures, which includes assaults. When the council's duty to house people becomes a problem, how should we communicate that to police?

Regarding the George Hotel, MCC has a housing manager and support team looking after the residents who need to be housed post-Covid. It's a daily task for them to coordinate, with dedicated support going into these places around the county. If particular individuals are causing trouble, Police, Health and Housing would work together to find more suitable accommodation. But it is a difficult, ongoing problem, especially for the Housing manager.

Can we understand how resources are divided in the area, as this leads to the apathy in recording crime?

Placement of resources is done on the basis of threat and risk. We have a number of dedicated neighbourhood resources based in Monmouth, Chepstow, Caldicot and Abergavenny, as well as bases from which response officers work. We have emerged from the pandemic into a

different landscape; we are starting to understand the issues that were created during that period, and have to learn to react to them. Through the partnership arrangements, we must ensure that our decision-making is more joined up e.g. if the local authority decides to place individuals in a certain location, we need to understand the cause and effect of that decision, as there is the likelihood of impact on a number of agencies. Those individuals are often assumed to be offenders but in fact often end up as victims.

People have trouble reporting their incidences online or by phone. Can the means of doing so be repeated to residents? A number of incidents of drug use and deals haven't been followed up, which is a problem of resources.

We do have issues about people being able to contact us. In the presentation there is a yellow bubble that goes into communication strategy specifically; as a partnership, our communications with the public have suffered in recent years. There is a massive piece of work to do with how people can get hold of us, as well as communicating the success stories, that sits within each of the sub-groups that we have identified. We have a dedicated Communications Officer now.

From an FOI request about resources: in July 2019 there were 270+ officers in county, down to 170 in 2022 – where have the resources gone? What can be done by the partnerships to better resource our communities?

Everywhere has seen a reduction in resourcing, but we're in the process of an uplift programme, with 100 officers coming into the force within the next 12 months, of which a proportion will be dedicated to Monmouthshire. A new neighbourhood inspector has started in Caldicot; he is looking at where resources are needed, and has identified Caldicot as a priority. On Friday 4 officers were sent to Caldicot from Newport, in addition to the existing resource – this exemplifies how we can flex neighbourhood resources to where they are needed, based on threat and risk.

Why is there not a visible Police station in the south of the county?

Rationalisation of the Police estate was carried out around 10 years ago based on the usage of the stations; given the footfall, it was deemed not viable to keep some open to the public, though officers still work inside.

Councillors used to have good relationships with local police, but lately there has been a quick turnover of inspectors. Is it possible we could slim down that turnover and renew the previous relationships?

Yes, agreed. The difficulty in a force the size of Gwent is that individuals take on specialist responsibilities, taking them away from their daily duties. We have already identified that and there is a move towards keeping those individuals within those roles for a minimum of 2 years, if possible.

It was suggested that money coming to Caldicot would go to CCTV – how useful has it been in detection and prosecution to date? Do we get value for money with it?

We are currently looking at how we best resource and manage the CCTV function. The number in Caldicot has increased and been upgraded from the original 6 analog cameras. The cameras are working but one of the issues diagnosed is when there is a fluctuation in a street light's electricity, knocking out the link. A USP is being put in to reduce the knockouts. The CCTV User Group meets regularly to raise issues and concerns. We have an upcoming meeting to see where we can bolster provision in Caldicot; we are aware of the gap between the Sandy Lane camera and Newport Road, for example. There are two parts to consider: detection and

prevention – it is hard to quantify detections from cameras and harder to assess the latter in relation to CCTV. We do know that people feel safer from having them. We are in consultation with CCTV providers now to ask what more we can be given. As ever, it comes to funding but the more people looking at the cameras, the better.

Can funding from bids be used for more hours for PSOs?

Unfortunately, in applying for funding from the Home Office, the bid has to explain what it will cover, and the remit has to be stuck to. The last round of bidding for Safer Streets was done on a Gwent footprint because previously it felt like a competition between LAs as to who has the most crime. Police recognise that there are problems spanning Gwent and receipt of funding in the first round shouldn't preclude bidding in the next rounds.

We didn't hear about the survey until 2 days before it closed. Are we getting information from the more vulnerable?

We apologise for the tight deadline – the timeline was set by the Home Office. By the time we were aware that we could bid, we had a 2-3 week window to craft it. We are starting to look at the communications and engagement plan running alongside the Safer Monmouthshire group, so that the public isn't only speaking to us when we're consulting on a bid. We want an ongoing dialogue, especially to hear the more vulnerable voices coming through, and to reach those not online.

Is ASB link to the reduced childhood and youth provision? In looking at problem-solving, would Youth Services, District Nurses, Social Workers and Early Years Provision be good people to include?

The problem-solving group will be multi-agency. We need to think about prevention as well as responding to incidents in Caldicot and will take a wider partnership view to do so. Youth Services, MonLife, Positive Outcomes, Schools Liaison officers, CCTV, GDAS and others are attending the meeting. Town Councils will also be represented. The suggestion of early years representation is noted.

The strategic assessment hasn't been renewed since 2019 – when will it be updated, and what is the timeline?

We're reviewing how to conduct the strategic assessment at a Gwent level. Discussions are ongoing as we recognised, pre-Covid, that by the time we received it our planning was already in place, and we want to make the document more meaningful for us in practice. There is no definite timeline in place but we're looking for the next strategic assessment to be developed in the next financial year at least. We receive the monthly crime analysis packs and pull in data through Safer Monmouthshire partners. But the current challenge is that the data from the regional boards isn't flowing in the way we need.

What do the Police actually do about antisocial behaviour? Are we really getting the support we need for our residents' problems? We have emails from residents all the time saying that they are not getting the support e.g. a recent email concerning noise pollution.

Please forward that email. For us at a Partnership level, it's important that we know if you're not getting the right service at a local level – there are more people who have a part to play in an instance such as the one the email describes than just the Police. This is precisely why we have set up the partnership in the way we have, so that we can hold others to account and ensure they are playing their part.

Where are the Hate Crime statistics?

Hate Crime is coordinated by Gwent Police, and we have a Hate Crime Awareness partnership. There is a Community Cohesion officer whom we share with Newport. The data is not included in the report but we can get the statistics in that area for the committee. In the last 12-18 months, we have tried to increase the amount of reporting that we receive – there had been a huge level of underreporting of Hate Crime statistics across Gwent. We've achieved that increase, now it's about getting towards more positive outcomes.

Chair's Summary:

Clearly there are huge gaps in the data. Members agreed that at a further point, that data could be collated and we could invite the Crime Commissioner in for further scrutiny and discussion. Chief Inspector Davies agreed: the data will be supplied to the Community & Partnerships team. Over the last 12-18 months, there has been an increase in the reporting – the next phase is going into achieving positive outcomes, which is being worked on currently. The Chief Inspector agreed to come back to the committee to update them on that work.

Councillor Butler suggested that the data could be shown in better ways e.g. percentage against population in specific towns, etc., in order to better show trends.

The Chair observed that since Covid, there has been a huge increase in hate crimes towards the Chinese and Asian community. We're not doing enough to reach out to those people so any initiative or data that can be supplied would be welcome.

Members are encouraged to look at the upcoming Hate Crime Awareness week sessions.

The committee will write to the PSB to advise them of concerns around the general lack of data to substantiate the issues we are seeing within our communities, urging them to ensure partners provide us with relevant statistical data for community safety.

Thank you to the Chief Inspector and officers for today.

5. To consider the Public Services Scrutiny Committee's forward work programme

Dementia Services will be scrutinised on 28th November, with Health Board and Gwent Regional Partnership Board in attendance. The committee could consider a future item on the role and remit of the Integrated Services Partnership Board. Also reviewing the efficacy of the Early Years Transformation Plan. Revisiting today's report will go on to the work programme for the future.

6. Minutes of the previous meeting held on 18th July 2022

The minutes were confirmed and signed as an accurate record, proposed by Councillor Stevens and seconded by Councillor Jones, with the following amendment:

Councillor Bond noted that her question/suggestion regarding role-modelling behaviour in the use of plastics included Coleg Gwent i.e. whether the college could be influenced to reduce their plastics use.

7. To note the date and time of the next meeting:

Monday 28th November, 10.00.

The meeting ended at **4.23 pm**

