

Monmouthshire Select Committee Minutes

Meeting of Public Services Scrutiny Committee held at The Council Chamber, County Hall, The Rhadyr, Usk, NP15 1GA with remote attendance on Monday, 24th April, 2023 at 10.00 am

Councillors Present

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

County Councillors: Jill Bond, Jan Butler,
Penny Jones, Malcolm Lane, Frances Taylor,
Sue Riley (substitute for Dale Rooke)

Also in attendance: County Councillor Sarah
Burch (Cabinet Member)
Inspector Ioan Williams

Officers in Attendance

Hazel Ilett, Scrutiny Manager
Robert McGowan, Policy and Scrutiny Officer

APOLOGIES: Councillor Dale Rooke

1. Declarations of Interest

None.

2. Public Open Forum

No submissions were received.

3. Hate Crime in Monmouthshire

The Inspector for Monmouthshire Ioan Williams attended on behalf of Chief Inspector John Davies to give an overview and broad understanding of hate crime in Monmouthshire. The chair advised that the committee had sought a statistical breakdown of crime in the county and how it compared with neighbouring authorities. He explained that the committee was interested in how we can evolve the conversation and increase awareness as well as gain more specific context as to where incidences are happening, because if the figures only show the hate crimes that have been reported and we know some people are not reporting, then we don't have a full picture. The chair reminded the committee that some questions asked of Monmouthshire County Council Staff, with input from St Giles Trust at the previous meeting had been sent to the Police to guide the discussion today.

The inspector provided a short introduction to the Police's role in terms of hate crime and how they support reporters:

I'll give you a general overview of hate crime in in the Monmouthshire area and how we how we deal with that on a daily basis. We don't have daily occurrences, levels are relatively low but any incident of hate crime is too many. In comparison with some other

Gwent areas, it is low. In terms of how we deal with reports, Gwent Police generate a daily briefing document every 24 hours and there's a specific section within it that relates to hate crime, to ensure early engagement, early action and hopefully early resolution. We have dedicated hate crime officers within the force who log hate crime incidences or even a hate incidence. It doesn't necessarily have to be a criminal matter for any incident to fall under that banner and be flagged to those specialist officers and they manage that engagement from that point forward. If it is a criminal matter, then an officer is allocated to investigate it and they will maintain that sort of investigatory oversight with the support of the specialist hate crime officer. From an overarching perspective, hate crime is managed well from my perspective and we do have clear oversight of it and as explained, specialist officers who are able to support, and investigate criminal matters.

Challenge:

- *Is there significant underreporting of hate crime?*

I think that all crime is underreported ultimately and that we're doing as much as we can in terms of enabling more reporting of crime through various reporting mechanisms, such as our social media reporting mechanisms, which has shown an increase in conversations with people who potentially may not have reported crime previously if just traditional telephony reporting was only available. I think all crime tends to be underreported, but I haven't noticed anything significant in terms of hate crime specifically being underreported. I think that work is being done and further work does need to be done in terms of our wider engagement, so that people will generally feel more comfortable in reporting matters affecting them.

- *Is there any evidence of the change in demography increasing case numbers? For example, particularly in the South, where we've had an influx of people for economic reasons, then post Brexit, we have EU citizens who have settled here. I've heard of the broader Asian Community having been targeted in some regions post covid and I'm wondering if possibly the LGBTQ+ community has faced increased hate crime? I also wonder whether the relationship the public has with the Police has changed, as due to a lack of resources, the Police do not attend community meetings and I just wonder if some of these factors may play a role?*

In terms of whether there is a specific demographic or group that have been targeted post Brexit, there's nothing that I've been aware of or seen in any significant quantity around any targeted groups. I think the relationship generally is very good and what I would say is that the majority of instances that I review from a hate crime or hate incidents perspective are generally around sexual orientation and disability ~ these are the two things that pop up more often than not. Incidences don't generally tend to be related to race, immigration or aspects like that, from my perspective.

In terms of the point around police presence, there are logistical problems in Monmouthshire as there are only a number of us who work in the area and there's a huge area to cover with a significant number of councillors, so we are reviewing how we keep you updated, but when we have had issues, in my opinion, we've dealt with them swiftly and we have a very good relationship with councillors, for example, you will all

probably be aware of issues in Caldicot last summer and that it was a problem that had been simmering for years and I feel that we dealt with that robustly and conducted a number of action days, a number of arrests and we removed some real problematic individuals from the area and the issues have reduced, so what I would say is if there are significant problems, we are dealing with them. Engagement can and will be better and I think once we have two sergeants in post, they'll be able to manage that relationship more effectively. I am aware that people do report incidences to yourselves, which then come to the police third hand and that is problematic, particularly if it's specific incidents whereby you know the public are reluctant to speak with us directly, but we'd much rather know about it, so we can take some mitigation from that point, so if you do get information please pass it to us.

- *How many hate crimes are reported in an average year and for the public's benefit, please could you define what hate crime is and explain how you deal with different hate crimes differently?*

I'll need to send you statistical information following the meeting, but in terms of the second question, every front line officer will have a perspective on what hate crime is and I haven't the official definition with me, but my understanding would be that it's where an individual has been targeted because of a disability, faith or religion or a sexual orientation or where such factors may be related to the incident.

- *How many officers have you got to deal with hate crime and how broad is the training?*

I'll need to provide that information after the meeting in terms of specialist training, but we have force training days for all officers.

- *What are we doing with schools to ensure they are reporting it? What else are we doing aside from talking to schools?*

In terms of how can involve the conversation and increase awareness specifically in schools, we have school's liaison officers who are allocated specifically to schools and they undertake a specific training package around schools policing, dealing with young people and hate crime would be part of their training package. What are we doing with schools to ensure that they are reporting it? Well we have that direct link with the school's liaison officer who the teachers are able to call upon directly to report those aspects back to us, so that SLO, as we term them, are a proven tool in ensuring adequate reporting from the school to the police.

- *Do you think austerity has impacted on the service you can offer?*

In terms of wider resourcing for policing and how austerity is has impacted us, that's a question I cannot answer, but what I would say is that we have good officers in the Monmouthshire Neighbourhood Policing Team and we have excellent supervision and I'm really confident that going forward that we have enough resources to deal with the problems that can and will arise. We have recruitment ongoing now, which we will get a percentage of in the Monmouthshire area, so I'm happier in our position going forward into the next 12 months. I'm confident that we will have better engagement with you, from the public from a wider perspective and we have the capacity and capability to deal with things effectively.

- *In respect of radicalisation of young people via online activity. What preventative measures are in place if we think there is an issue? I'm aware of some inappropriate and unhelpful remarks on community Facebook pages relating to people of different ethnic groups, such as Asian people running a village store and appreciating you cannot monitor people's social media, I just wonder whether the Police ever review these?*

Whilst we have cybercrime capabilities, but we can't actively monitor people's Facebook groups, but I accept your point and officers are able to offer advice around matters like that or just have conversations with people to help people's understanding of differences in culture, so if you are aware of a problem or an issue and wanted to raise it with us, please do, because we can help in some way. We have an officer in Gwent Police's headquarters who leads our diversity and inclusion team and she has a multitude of resources available and excellent relationships within the community and with community leaders, so as councillors, we would ask you to assist us in highlighting where conversations may need to happen.

- *I'm concerned that there is a reluctance within schools when an issue is raised to deal with it via police because of the long-term effects of being labelled a criminal from a very young age, but I feel this needs to be balanced against the long-term effects of those on the receiving end of it, bullying being an example. So does this reluctance to criminalise impact on the recording of hate crimes?*

A real drive for Gwent Police recently has been to record crime in in the most appropriate way, so a hate crime or hate incident is recorded regardless as it's from the perspective of the reporter, so if they feel that a particular aspect has had an influence in the crime being committed, then it will be recorded and investigated as such. In terms of Schools Liaison Officers, in my experience, I've seen the difference good engagement with schools can make, where pupils have confidence in them and feel able to report incidences, so these officers are invaluable. We've got two School Liaison Officers allocated to Monmouthshire for 32 schools and their remit is one for the North and one for the South.

In terms of your point about criminalizing young people, I don't want young people to be criminalized as we know people make mistakes when they're young and make bad choices and depending on the threshold of what that is, a reasonable approach has to be taken. The Youth Offending Service support us and have officers seconded to them and they pick up all lower-level issues with young people, so we apply a common sense approach when dealing with young people, but have the ability to escalate things, should the offence be severe. The YOS are exceptional and they deliver intervention and prevention programs working alongside the Police, Probation Services and all the other services.

Chair's Summary:

The Chair thanked Inspector Ioan Williams for attending and provided comprehensive and honest answers to the committee. Actions agreed:

1. loan to collate the statistical information on hate crime and send to the scrutiny team for distribution to Members.
2. loan to provide contact details for the Equality and Diversity Team for Members.
3. The Police to send a reminder of the various social media channels to report crimes.

4. County Lines and Exploitation

The Chair welcomed Danielle, former senior case worker on the serious organized crime and CSU Finance project and Rebecca, Team Leader for Community Projects in Wales to the meeting to talk about the services provided by St Giles Trust to young people who may have been radicalised or become involved in county lines activity. The chair reminded the committee that the People Scrutiny Committee will be hosting a scrutiny workshop for Members on County Lines in July (date to be confirmed) and that all Members would be invited to the session.

Danielle and Rebecca explained that St Giles Trust is a national charity that has been operating for 60 years and 10 years in Wales, using expertise and real life/lived experience to empower people who may have been held back by poverty, been exploited or abused or those dealing with addictions or mental health problems or have been caught up in the criminal justice system. They provided a detailed explanation of the services provided, slides being available on the website together with the agenda. Following detailed discussion, Members asked the following questions.

Challenge:

How are the projects that are delivered in the Gwent area that you have explained in detail funded?

The Wedge service is funded by the police crime commissioner, who funds nearly all of the projects apart from the girls empowerment which I believe is funded by Newport Capsule. We received Top-Up funding via our head office in the South Wales area to deliver it across Gwent and we have funding for children in need. Some of the contracts were Ministry of Justice contracts, but we do go for small pots of money from businesses and other avenues.

- *I'm interested to know about the charity aspect, whether fundraising is on a local basis or a London basis?*

We have team members in Wales and our own Development Manager in Wales, but the main team is in London. We try to resource anything locally and hold our own fundraising events.

- *My background has been in victim offender mediation, family mediation and community mediation, the ethos of which is to try and get a greater understanding of how the victim feels by the action they're experiencing. Do you think we do enough of that, whether it's within the curriculum or via other means,*

because if we could get people to understand that, maybe there would be greater respect?

There's always more that can be done on that level, but St Giles Trust doesn't just deliver sessions to young people, but also to parents, teachers and the police, so we give the information to everybody who needs it, but yes, there is always more that can be done.

- *It would be good to hear of some examples, but I understand because of confidentiality, that may not be possible. I'm interested in the root causes, whether these are external factors such as the cost of living, or whether it's people's ability to cope with things or implications from their home life, so whether there are links to counselling and support from Mind, Cams etc. I'm also wondering how big the problem is and whether there's a massive need out there that you're not able to help, when you'd really like to and haven't got endless resources.*

Due to confidentiality, we can't discuss examples, but what I will say is that you know that when the problem changes, the trend changes, for example, there could be a big problem in one area and then it will calm down and it's a case of moving the problem. I think the police help with the disruption and social services and schools have eyes on the community, so I think the trend and the problem moves and changes constantly. In terms of the root of the problem, the cost of living is not helping, because poverty is increasing in families and post covid, there are a lot of children struggling in returning to school. Also other issues could be factors, such as employment issues, where parents may be out of work or struggling financially. In terms of counselling and referral to other organisations, some people are referred to Mind and Cams via GP's and we use the well-being officers within schools and colleges to highlight services.

- *You mentioned that caseworkers have up to 15 cases each? Is that manageable?*

Sometimes we have really complex cases others, whereas others are a bit of a light touch, just giving awareness and information, doing some work with the families and ensuring that they're linking in with the teachers or getting some additional help from other organizations. In terms of the caseworkers, they are allocated referrals for the whole of Gwent, but what we tend to do when we receive a referral is to look at everyone's caseloads to see who has capacity, and to ensure everyone has a mix of complex ones and light touch ones. We have a waiting list, but the quality of the service is important, and we have delivered to quite a few schools in the Gwent area but if you could let more schools know that we are available, that would be helpful.

- *I'm very interested to note that you um you encourage self-referral by young people? I've not heard about your service before so how are you getting your message across to those young people so that they can self-refer?*

We use the opportunity in schools, also attend youth clubs and any other event and there have been football events in the summer, music events, so we try and get to those and network as much as we can. We do have some self-referrals, but they less common. Usually the children approach the caseworker after the school session, so in

terms of how we reach out to them, whilst we are on You Tube, I think they're just using web search.

Whilst we know poverty can be a factor, county lines can easily come in good demographic areas and good schools and it's more a question of the vulnerability and availability of the young people, so it does need more awareness. We highlight in our presentations that it's not just an issue for the single parent household or the one facing poverty, or the big housing estates. We have worked with parents who are professionals, teachers, nurses or GP's. That's where we find the self-referrals tend to come in, so whereas kids used to be targeted if they had vulnerabilities like being in a family in receipt of benefits and wanting to belong to something, now perpetrators of this crime know that those kids are more noticeable now and are targeting kids whose parents are professionals, those who don't have the involvement of a social worker, because it is easier for them to move them around and because there are not on anyone's radar. So we must look for shifts and different trends, but the criminals are always looking for ways around it, to reduce the eyes on their operation, so the situation is changing constantly.

- *What do you think the root causes of those people getting involved? Is it money, social media glamorization of the criminal lifestyle?*

I think people want to belong. Some children could have professional parents who are out working all the time and don't have anyone at home monitoring them and they want to belong to something, so they're easily targeted and they start liking pictures on social media and then these people know what they like and entice them in by messages asking if they want to make some money or do want to be involved, so I think they are targeted through social media, so the demographics are always changing.

I'm wondering if you have a view on whether as a rural county that is in close proximity to major cities, whether you have noticed more illegal economic activity in the south of the county since the bridge tolls were axed and whether you have seen greater sophistication in the way that these gangs operate particularly with younger children?

I think this would be more of a question for the Police, because they would have that type of information. The county lines activity doesn't necessarily have to come from England, as there are well established networks in Wales, with networks in bigger cities targeting these smaller towns where they know that they can build a network, because there's less activity, so it's changed and now it's just any opportunity to get into small areas. We have caseworkers in Gwent, Cardiff, Swansea, Bristol, Somerset and Gloucester, so we see young people who have been exploited and moved around different counties. If we find they're being relocated by Social Services into a different residential home or care home, we're able to have that seamless handover of information between our teams. We regularly discuss whether trends are changing.

- *What would be a snapshot of your typical week?*

Caseworkers would book their appointments ahead, which could be in a school setting or a community setting. Young people could be NEET (not in education or employment) so we may need to go into the family home and help them develop a CV, we may be identifying positive networks for them, but we may also be receiving phone calls from

parents to say the young person has gone missing or been arrested and we'll do what we can as a multi-agency member with the other services to try and relocate or ensure that child is safe.

- *How do you win trust, for example, how do you liaise with people and communicate with families, who you know may not necessarily want to liaise with Social Services because they don't trust them or the Police. How do you overcome that and build up that trust?*

There's a large amount of our caseworkers that have lived experience, so they can relate to the issues and the needs of the child in the family. I have my own lived experience, having grown up in a household where there was domestic violence and involvement of Social Services and I ended up getting into the wrong crowd when I was a teenager, so I have experience of addiction, of prison and of probation services, so I've experienced quite a lot of the stuff that the young people have experienced themselves. I was expelled from school, I couldn't get a job because of my criminal record, so all these things I have personal experience about and when I'm talking with parents, I bridge the gap between the social services. I speak to them because they look up to people on the street. These young people turn away from statutory services, so what I do is I come in with my lived experience and talk to these people exactly how they would sit and talk to their friends so I have a conversation with them and they will listen to what I've said because I can speak to them with the experiences that they've gone through and we can bridge that gap between the Professional Services and between these families and young people. Because of the knowledge we have, the experiences we have, people listen to what we have to say because they don't see us as just reading it from a book or giving them advice that you haven't experienced. Our lived experience helps us to educate them and they do listen to us.

You also give them validation and care which perhaps they haven't had an awful lot of in their upbringing and you're showing them that empowerment is the key. A lot of them lack confidence and lack self-esteem and it's just seeing somebody like myself, who has been through the experiences they've been through, such as prison, and then managed to turn it around, you can become positive role models, showing them that there's a life after this and you can have nice trainers that you bought yourself without being involved in crime, you can have a good job and you can still be a part of your community, you don't have to be a sheep and follow the people who are involved in crime and you can make your own way in life. This is the huge part of the job we do.

Chair's Summary:

Thank you so much for coming along and it's really lit the committee up, in terms of our interest and concern in this issue I can speak confidently for all the committee in our desire to invite you back to us in the next month or two to do a workshop on county lines, which we really looking forward to. So thank you for coming along and explaining everything to us. The work you do is extremely impressive and this is this is the kind of stuff that reminds me why we do what we do and try to cooperate with you and understand what you do in helping young people.

5. Public Services Scrutiny Committee Forward Work Programme and Action List

The work programme was noted and invitations for the next meeting were agreed.

6. Cabinet and Council Work Planner

Noted.

7. Minutes of the previous meeting held on 1st March 2023

The minutes of the previous meeting were agreed.

8. Next Meeting

19th June 2023.