

Monmouthshire Select Committee Minutes

Meeting of Public Services Scrutiny Committee held at Council Chamber, County Hall, The Rhadyr USK on Tuesday, 7th May, 2024 at 1.00 pm

Councillors Present

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

County Councillors: Jill Bond, Jan Butler, Steven Garratt, Meirion Howells, Dale Rooke

Officers in Attendance

Hazel Ilett, Scrutiny Manager
Robert McGowan, Policy and Scrutiny Officer
Sharran Lloyd, LSB Development Manager
Martyn Smith
Amanda Thomas, Chief Inspector
Andrew Mason, Project Officer ASB

APOLOGIES: County Councillors Malcolm Lane and Frances Taylor

1. Declarations of Interest

None.

2. Public Open Forum

No submissions were received.

3. Serious Violence Duty: Regional Strategy

The Partnerships Manager explained presented the Gwent Serious Violence Duty Strategy, which was developed in response to the new legislation that requires multi-agency collaboration to prevent and tackle serious violence. She explained the definition of serious violence, the data sources and challenges, the four priorities and actions, the governance arrangements for the strategy and the funding. She highlighted the need for multi-agency collaboration, localised approaches and evidence-based interventions. Martin Smith from the Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner explained the national and local context and advised that the focus is on homicide and knife crime, and the intervention and prevention work with young people and offenders. Chief Inspector Amanda Thomas also assisted in answering Members' questions.

Questions from Committee:

- A Member asked how the town and community councils are involved and engaged in the strategy and the data collection. Sharon, Martin and Amanda explained that they are key partners and that they are planning to enhance the engagement with them and the wider community through local meetings and surveys.

- A question was asked data analysis and benchmarking, in particular, the choice of 2019-2020 as the baseline year, the percentages in the report, the progress of the data analysis system, the allocation of funding, and the comparison with low crime areas. The partnerships Manager answered that the year was chosen by the Home Office, that the data will be refined and updated, that the funding will be used to support existing services and local needs, and that the crime and anti-social behaviour data is monitored and responded to regularly. Martin and Amanda clarified that the data was based on a five-year window, but there were variations due to COVID, that the data analysis system was using a portal that collated data from health boards and police, that the funding was used to support existing and localised interventions. They explained that the data is evolving and that they are using different sources, including A&E data, to get a better picture. They advised that they were looking at other areas for learning and comparison. They also advised that they are using the funding to embed systemic change and to address local issues.
- A Member asked why Monmouthshire has seen an increase in serious violence and how the strategy can influence the change given the reduction of services and resources over the years. Martin and Amanda acknowledged the impact of factors such as aces, covid, domestic abuse and knife crime and said that they are working with partners to address the risk factors and to provide intervention and prevention work.
- A question was asked about the consistency of data recording and reporting among the partner organisations and the turnover of inspectors. Martin and Amanda answered that they were working to ensure that the data was reliable and comparable, and that the PCC was responsible for holding the police to account and ensuring a smooth handover of the duty.
- Members questioned the impact of funding cuts on mental health support services and how the police are coping with the increased demand. Amanda explained that they are working the best they can with social services and other partner agencies, but that funding has affected all agencies and impacted on some delivery. She advised that they have a mental health advisor in the control room who can check the health records of people who call in with mental health issues and provide guidance to officers.
- A Member asked about the violence prevention portal that collects data from A&E and how it can help to identify the root causes of violence and mental health issues. Martin explained that the portal allows them to look at the types of injuries, the locations, the age groups, and the gender of people who attend A&E with violence-related injuries. He said that this can help them to understand the drivers of violence and the risk factors, and to develop evidence-based interventions and strategies.
- Another Members questioned the definition of serious violence and whether it includes domestic abuse and sexual violence. Sharon advised that they have

developed their own definition of serious violence based on the categories that they looked at in the data, and that it includes domestic abuse and sexual violence, as well as stalking and harassment, arson threats to life, and assaults against professionals. She added that these are some of the categories that they see increasing trends in and that they have significant challenges around gathering and analysing data.

- The Chair asked why Hate Crime was not included in the national legislation section of the serious violence strategy document. Martin, from the Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner agreed that he would take that point back to the next group meeting and replied that hate crime was embedded in violent crime categories. Amanda also gave some information about the operational perspective of hate crime and how they are working with communities and partners to encourage reporting and provide support.

Chair's Summary:

The Committee has discussed the funding for the serious violence duty and how it will be allocated across the CSPs and local authorities, the governance and accountability of the duty and the role of the PCC as the convener of the multi-agency approach. Members asked questions around the involvement of town and community councils, the impact of COVID on the baseline data, the best practice and benchmarking with other areas, and the underlying causes and root issues of serious violence. The Committee recognised the challenges of data collection and analysis and the need for better use of data to inform action and intervention and supported the priorities of the strategy, such as addressing the risk factors of violence, adopting place-based approaches, and working together on this with other partners.

4. Community Policing

Chief Inspector Amanda Thomas gave an overview of her role and responsibilities in Monmouthshire and Newport, explaining that she works closely with the Community Safety Partnership and that she oversees the neighbourhood teams, the problem-solving hubs, the rural crime team, and the hate crime portfolio. She also mentioned some of the current issues and initiatives related to crime and anti-social behaviour, such as knife crime, school liaison officers, and funding from the government and explained that she is committed to problem solving and working with partners and communities to make Monmouthshire a safe county.

Questions from Members:

- Members asked what the main priorities of the Community Safety Partnership (CSP) were in Monmouthshire. Amanda explained that the CSP has four thematic areas that it focuses on: serious organised crime, violence against women, domestic abuse and sexual violence, crime and antisocial behaviour, and exploitation. It also works on aligning its work with the regional boards and structures, such as the Gwent Public Services Board and the Serious Violence Duty.
- The Committee asked how the CSP works with schools and young people to prevent and tackle violence and antisocial behaviour. The Committee was advised that the CSP works with schools and young people through various initiatives, such

as the Headley Back programme, which is a mini police scheme that aims to educate and engage primary school children on community safety issues. The CSP also supports the Youth Offending Service and the Arts programme, which provide intervention and prevention work with young people who are at risk of offending or have offended. The CSP also works with the schools liaison officers, who provide support and guidance to schools on crime prevention, safeguarding, and restorative justice.

- The Chair asked how the CSP deals with hate crime and diversity issues in Monmouthshire. Amanda advised that the CSP has a hate crime portfolio, which is led by her as Chief Inspector. The CSP works with the Equality, Diversity and Inclusion team, which engages with various community groups, such as LGBT youth groups, mosque leaders, Asian women's groups, refugee and asylum seekers groups, to raise awareness and encourage reporting of hate crime and hate incidents.
- The Chair asked how the Police specifically deal with hate crime and what their relationship is with the schools. Amanda explained that hate crime is recorded and reported according to the College of Policing guidance and the Equality, Diversity and Inclusion team engages with vulnerable and minoritised groups to encourage reporting and build trust and confidence. Schools liaison officer funding was ended by the Welsh Government and there is a need to find alternative ways to work with schools and educate young people.
- A member asked how the police are engaging with the community councils and the wider community. Amanda explained that the police are trying to attend the community council meetings and local events when possible, and to communicate through email, Facebook, and the Gwent Police website. They are also looking to reintroduce community engagement around a place to get a local understanding of the community safety issues.
- Another Member asked what the police are doing to address the rural crime and the unauthorised heavy goods vehicles in some areas. Amanda explained that the police have a rural crime team that patrols the rural areas and deals with issues such as plant machinery theft, poaching, and off-road bikes. They also work with the traffic department to deal with the unauthorised heavy goods vehicles, and they encourage the residents to report any incidents through 101, Crime Stoppers, or online.
- Members questioned what are the police doing to address the serious violence and the knife crime in the county? Amanda explained that the police are working with the partners to implement the Gwent Serious Violence Duty Strategy, which was scrutinised in this meeting and that there are four priorities: better use of data, addressing the risk factors, joining the dots, and adopting place-based approaches. They also have a proactive neighbourhood enforcement team that can help with covert operations and foot patrols in the hotspot areas. They also have an operational plan for knife crime in Newport, which they plan to bring to Monmouthshire as well.

- The Committee highlighted the lack of police presence being a talking point in rural areas, Raglan residents not having seen a police patrol for a very long time. They asked whether there are any plans to increase police visibility even if only on a weekly to monthly basis, possibly coinciding with a Community Coffee morning on Tuesday for example which would reassure residents and enable the officers to get feedback about community issues. **Action: Amanda agreed to discuss this with her team.**
- Members asked whether technology can help with community policing. Andy Mason (Monmouthshire CSP) explained that there is a limited number of mobile CCTV units that can be deployed to hotspots, but they are not as effective as monitored town centre cameras and they require a privacy impact assessment and a clear purpose. There is a Gwent Police website where people can report incidents online and a Facebook DM option as well. Amanda advised that there is a Crime Stoppers service called Fearless that is designed for youngsters and uses social media platforms like TikTok and Snapchat to get information and intelligence.
- Members questioned how we can improve community confidence and engagement. Amanda replied that people are encouraged to report incidents through 101, 999, Crime Stoppers, or the local ward officer or CSO. Amanda advised that the Police have been granted £1m to deal with anti-social behaviour, which should enable more on foot patrols. Andy advised that if there is concern about anti-social behaviour at a location, it should be reported so that investigations can be made as to whether crime is being reported, whether there is supporting data and then a decision would be made as to whether a camera would be the best solution.
- A member queried the neighbourhood watch scheme. Amanda advised that they had a Neighbourhood Watch Coordinator who was funded by the Safer Streets Project, but the funding was withdrawn. She said that they are trying to enhance the Neighbourhood Watch Schemes and other watch schemes, such as Canal Watch, Allotment Watch, and Farm Watch, with the resources they have. She explained that Neighbourhood Watch Schemes are vital for providing information and intelligence to the police. She also said that they are planning to bring back the posters that display the names and faces of the ward officers and the community support officers, and that they will make them available on the Gwent Police website and on Twitter. She said that people can contact their local ward officer or community support officer by email if they have any issues or concerns.
- Members asked whether mental health services are working effectively with the Police. The Committee heard that it can be difficult working across partnerships and as such, Members agreed to include Mental Health Services as a topic into their forward work programme. **Action: Scrutiny Team.**
- Members commented that they were aware that the Schools Liaison Programme is due to end in July and schools are telling them it will be a great loss, asking how the Police plan to plug the gap this will create. Members feel it is important to strengthen joint working between the Police and schools, to prevent a lot of the issues occurring, not just safeguarding. Amanda explained that they are

reviewing gap in provision at moment, and that a report is currently being prepared, but that they are analysing the incidences of crime in all schools and putting a triage in place for the schools that need it and that whilst the support won't be as focussed as it is now without the funding, they aim to put a programme in place across Gwent, recognising how important the work was.

- A member asked for a brief update on the outcome of the Peel Report. Amanda advised that significant improvements have been made in the processes and training of the staff in response to the report, and that the force achieved a good standard of evidence and risk assessment in most cases. As a result, the cause for concern was removed by the HMIC FRS.
- An update was asked on Operation Harley. Amanda explained that Operation Harley is the force's response to deal with antisocial behaviour vehicles, such as off-road bikes, electric scooters, and unauthorised heavy goods vehicles and that it involved deploying officers and community safety wardens to patrol hotspot areas, seize vehicles, and issue fines or warnings. She advised that it involves multi-agency cooperation and that in Monmouthshire, Operation Harley has been used a couple of times, but no seizures have been reported. However, if there are any issues with these types of vehicles in the future, the operation will be deployed accordingly.

Chair's Summary:

The Chair thanked Amanda for her significant input in both topics under scrutiny and said the Committee felt reassured with the comprehensive answers that had been provided.

5. To consider the Public Services Committee's forward work programme and action list

The following additions were agreed for inclusion into the Forward Work Programme:

- Illegal sale of vaping ~ environmental health and dangers of black market vapes, with an invitation to Trading standards and also a representative from education.
- Mental health and links to other organisations such as Mind.

6. Minutes of the previous meeting held on 11th December 2023.

The minutes of the meeting held on the 11th December 2023 were approved.

7. To note the date and time of the next meeting: 14th October 2024

To be confirmed (17th June was postponed)

The meeting ended at **3.17 pm**

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