

EXETER CITY COUNCIL

COMMUNITY SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

3 SEPTEMBER 2002

EXECUTIVE

17 SEPTEMBER 2002

**FINAL REPORT OF THE COMMUNITY SAFETY BEST VALUE REVIEW
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

1 PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 To report on the conclusions of the Best Value Review of Community Safety.

2 BACKGROUND TO THE REVIEW

- 2.1 Exeter City Council, Devon County Council and Exeter District Police have undertaken a best value review to examine the extent and effectiveness of their efforts to improve community safety. The review also focused on a number of strategic issues in relation to the Community Patrol Service.

- 2.2 The three agencies adopted a common approach but, whilst partnership working is considered, the review did not set out to examine the work of the Community Safety Partnership or to evaluate individual projects in any detail. From the Council's perspective the review aimed to explore whether the authority is responding effectively to the community safety agenda and meeting its legal obligations by:

- Ensuring that those services that have a high impact on improving community safety are responding effectively
- Considering whether appropriate structures, systems, financial procedures, resources and performance measures that are in place for achieving and sustaining improvements to community safety and the prevention of crime and disorder
- Examining whether the Council is considering the community safety implications of all its activity and day to day decisions
- Contributing effectively to the work of the Community Safety Partnership

3 MAIN FINDINGS

- 3.1 There is a broad range of issues that justify the Council's continued commitment to community safety in addition to the statutory requirements of the Crime and Disorder Act. It was considered inappropriate to pursue alternative options for delivering the Council's community safety activity in view of the requirement for a partnership under the provisions of the legislation.
- 3.2 The Review found that the Council is involved in a significant amount of community safety activity which is led by the Portfolio Holder and given priority through the Council's corporate objectives. The Chief Executive assumes overall responsibility

for this function, with officer support from the Policy Unit and Partnership Co-ordinator

- 3.3 There is evidence that the Council is doing all that is reasonably practicable to prevent crime and disorder and respond to community safety by providing a range of services and facilities that contribute directly to the improvement of community safety e.g. CCTV and Community Patrollers.
- 3.4 In addition, the Council has responded effectively to the wider 'mainstreaming' requirements of Section 17 of the Crime and Disorder Act 1998 at both corporate and individual service levels. Within the Council, community safety has been mainstreamed by building community safety into corporate and budget processes, considering the community safety implications of all Council activities and day to day decisions and ensuring the security of staff, property and facilities.
- 3.5 The review found that the Council takes a lead role in the Community Safety Partnership through its financial contribution to joint projects and the co-ordinator role, and involvement in task groups.
- 3.6 The effectiveness of a local authority's contribution to improving community safety is notoriously difficult to measure. Despite these difficulties it is significant to note that those performance indicators that the Council is obliged to publish in relation to community safety do highlight the low levels of crime in the city. This picture is enhanced when recorded crime figures for vehicle crime, burglary and violent crime are compared with other cities in Exeter's family group. In terms of partnership performance, to which the Council makes a significant contribution, Exeter ranked 92nd best performer out of 375 districts.
- 3.7 Despite the positive impact that the Council's input and partnership working appear to be having on improving community safety, the review identified that improvements are needed in the following key areas:
 - Anti-social behaviour and minor disorder at the local level remain a significant public concern. Reviews of best practice identified that adoption of the 'problem solving approach' in other areas had helped to address this by tackling the cause of problems of crime and disorder rather than just the obvious symptoms.
 - There are barriers to be overcome in terms of multi-agency communication, liaison and information sharing if long-term solutions are to be implemented.
 - Actual costs of crime and disorder proved difficult to obtain and quantify making any evaluation of the cost-effectiveness of Council activity difficult.
 - there is a loose connection between the priorities identified in the Community Safety Strategy, the Council's Strategic Objectives and the activity undertaken at service level.
 - Residents did not appear to know enough about the Council's work in connection with community safety in order to be able to offer an opinion on it.
 - There are a number of Council services where additional community safety activity might be undertaken, at no extra cost, as part of the mainstreaming requirement to build community safety into everyday work.

- The overall response to mainstreaming could be improved through a number of initiatives that will ensure full compliance with the legislation.

4 COMMUNITY PATROL SERVICE (including Neighbourhood Wardens)

- 4.1 Research and consultation revealed overall levels of satisfaction with the service and public support for the provision of a community patrol service.
- 4.2 The provision of a community patrol service is not a statutory requirement and in theory the entire service could be externalised. The service does however perform a number of statutory functions including district surveillance in respect of nuisance and a number of essential functions including the Out of Hours Service and formal monitoring for nuisance and anti-social behaviour
- 4.3 Preliminary research into alternative methods of service delivery were undertaken as part of the review but no examples of complete externalisation were found. Whilst some schemes have been set up as charitable organisations, research indicates that the structure and function of these schemes is significantly different from that operating in Exeter. It was also considered inappropriate to consider provision by what is currently an unregulated security industry. The incompatibility of the Council's service and that provided by neighbouring authorities would discount the option of joint provision at the present time.
- 4.4 An application has been submitted to the Home Office for an extension of the funding for the pilot Neighbourhood Warden Scheme. The result of this application was not available at the time of the review but the outcome, and the Council's re-consideration of its contribution to this function, will clearly be of significance for the future direction of the entire Community Patrol Service beyond March 2003 and a further efficiency review will need to be undertaken at that time.
- 4.5 The current 'light-touch' review identified that the following key areas require further attention, including:
- Opportunities offered by the recently published Police Bill for civilianisation of some police functions.
 - Future funding for the Community Wardens pilot scheme when government funding ends in March 2003.
 - Potential efficiency savings through the reorganization of the community patrol and community wardens into one multi-disciplined service.
 - Impact on anti-social behaviour and crime.
 - Limited data mapping capability and exchange of information with the Police.
 - Improved partnership working with the police and links with the Community Safety Partnership.
 - Limited public awareness and ensuring that public expectations of the service are met.
 - Reviewing working and operating hours.

5 KEY REVIEW PROPOSALS

Community Safety

- In conjunction with the County Council, police and other agencies introduce a trial of the ‘problem solving approach’ in one area of the city (the area subject to Surestart). Pilot a Multi-Agency Community Safety Intervention Model (MACSIM) with a view to finding sustainable solutions to specific problems (e.g. problem families) or issues in specific locations (e.g. problems with young people on a housing estate).
- Develop a practical plan for improving data quality, ensuring effective information sharing and making use of geographical information systems (GIS) for analysing crime and disorder patterns and relating them to other factors, thus ensuring the effective prioritisation and targeting of resources.
- Improve communication between City Council officers and Members and the Community Safety Partnership via a regular briefing from, or discussion with, the Community Safety Strategy Group.
- Develop a robust way of tracking the direct cost of crime and disorder (property damage, burglary and theft) and the cost of activity through appropriate financial codes.
- Adjust the Council’s corporate objectives following publication of the Community Strategy to clarify the link between the Council’s activity and priorities for the City.
- Enhance the Council’s current performance management to cover community safety activity as a means of monitoring the impact and effectiveness of community safety activity through the Best Value Performance Plan.
- Introduce broader and clearer communication of the Council’s input to community safety through the Exeter Citizen.
- Introduce new ways of working/new initiatives in several services (E.g. Planning Services and Car Parks Services) to improve community safety.
- Provide targeted training for Members and specific officers of Scrutiny Committees and Planning and Licensing Committees to improve knowledge of issues of crime and disorder and potential solutions and to ensure that due regard is given to Section 17.
- Ensure that those staff working in services that can have an impact on community safety require guidance on Section 17 and knowledge of the impact that their particular area of work can have on crime and disorder.
- Ensure that community safety is integrated into any revisions of the Best Value Review process and that individual services address the issue, and opportunities for increased joint working in service planning.

Community Patrol

- Enactment of the Police Bill is required before it is clear what additional powers will be available. Pending the introduction of the Bill it is proposed that viable partnership with the police and a clearer division of responsibility is required rather than seeking additional powers or new responsibilities.
- Depending on the outcome of the funding application, and subject to the Council being in a position to increase its contribution, consider:

- integration of the community patrollers and community wardens when matched funding of the pilot scheme ends in March 2004
 - Division of roles into patrollers who respond to incidents and undertake practical duties and those who adopt a more proactive, problem-solving role devising long-term solutions in liaison with other agencies
- Dedicate some staff to outreach work tackling problems of youth disorder in the community
 - Improve data capture and exchange methods and negotiate systems and protocols for exchange of information
 - Develop web-based information sharing with the police to utilise GIS mapping and ‘hot spotting’
 - Undertake customer satisfaction surveys to establish why there is low awareness of the service and its limitations
 - Enhance joined up working by holding regular liaison meetings with the police and other agencies
 - Following confirmation on the position regarding Home Office funding, post March 2003 consider operating the service 17 hours, 7 days with extensions to address student issues or late night disorder

6 COST AND RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1 A bid to fund the trial of the multi-agency, problem solving approach has been submitted to the Crime Reduction Team, Government Office South West. In the event of this bid failing it is not proposed to seek additional funding from the Council.
- 6.2 The improvements to data and information sharing capacity is likely to involve investment in information technology but, similarly, it is intended that funds will be sought from Government Office South West.
- 6.3 The Car Parks Service has identified a number of potential improvements that are incorporated in that service’s Best Value Review and which will be addressed through the standard AIMs process.
- 6.4 There are no other resource issues arising from this review aside from the officer time involved in implementing the improvements.

7 RECOMMENDED

- 7.1 It is recommended that Scrutiny Committee Community supports and Executive agrees that:
- (1) the Council continues its involvement in Community Safety
 - (2) subject to the outcome of the funding bid to the Home Office and the ensuing review of the Community Patrol Service, the Council continues to provide the service in house
 - (3) the proposals contained in the Improvement Plan, in particular the key review proposals identified in paragraph 5 of the report, and the performance indicators contained in the appendices attached to the report be approved.

CHIEF EXECUTIVE

h:committee/902SCC9
21 August 2002

Local Government (Access to Information) Act 1985 (as amended)

Background papers used in compiling this report:

Exeter Community Safety Strategy and Audit 2002
Crime and Disorder Act 1998