
BEST VALUE REVIEW - COMMUNITY SAFETY

1 SUMMARY

- 1.1 The aim of this report is to progress the local Best Value review of Community Safety by providing a closer inspection of the current service provided by the District Council, and seeking Members' views on proposed actions to improve the service.

2 BACKGROUND

- 2.1 The Government makes it clear that crime reduction is not simply a matter for the police and as such Partnership working lies at the heart of the Crime and Disorder Act. The Crime and Disorder Act, 1998 formalised arrangements for partnership working between Rochford District Council, Essex Police and other agencies to develop and enhance local crime reduction.
- 2.2 In April 2002 a revised Crime and Disorder Reduction Strategy for period 2002 - 2005 was agreed by the Rochford Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnership. As with the first strategy, an audit of local crime and disorder problems was carried out. As well as inviting comment from the people who live and work within Rochford District, relevant information from all the key partners was collected and taken into account.
- 2.3 In line with Government guidance, efforts were made to ensure that the local community was involved in the collection of information on crime and disorder and the development of the strategy. To this end, a questionnaire on crime and disorder was published in the Council's newspaper 'Rochford District Matters' and distributed to all households in the District. Specific hard to reach groups, such as young and older people were also targeted. The results from direct public consultation and the survey helped to shape the findings of the Audit, and have been used as part of this review.
- 2.4 Between July 2001 and May 2002 Essex County Council, the twelve district authorities and Essex Police undertook a joint best value review of community safety focusing on alcohol and drug-related crime and disorder. Based upon this, in December 2002 a joint inspection by the Audit Commission and Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary was completed.

**3 COUNTY BEST VALUE REVIEW OF COMMUNITY SAFETY -
DRUGS AND ALCOHOL**

- 3.1 The joint inspection by the Audit Commission and Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary scored the service based upon how well the individual agencies acted and used their own resources to improve community safety and how well they worked together.
- 3.2 The Inspection concluded that the partnerships in Essex provide a 'good', two-star service that has promising prospects for improvement. The judgements were based on the evidence obtained during the inspection.
- 3.3 A summary of the findings of this review can be seen in Appendix A. The Review of Community Safety has taken account of these findings in developing its action plan.

**4 ROCHFORD DISTRICT COUNCIL COMMUNITY SAFETY BEST
VALUE REVIEW**

- 4.1 Given that both the production of the new Crime and Disorder Reduction Strategy and the County Best Value Review focused on the Rochford Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnership, it was considered that the scope for this Best Value review would best be restricted to Rochford District Council Community Safety activity so that the Council could ensure that it remained focussed on seeing continuous improvements in this area.
- 4.2 The basic principle of the review is that the requirements of the Crime and Disorder Act go beyond just the reduction of crime and disorder into a broader approach towards creating safer communities. This has been summed up by the Home Office:

"The term community safety is seen as having both situational and social aspects, as being concerned with people, communities and organisations, including families, victims and risk groups as well as attempting to reduce particular types of crime and the fear of crime. Community safety should be seen as the legitimate concern of all in the local community".

4.3 Rochford's Best Value Review of Community Safety therefore focuses on making a difference to the community in terms of outcomes. As a result, the framework for the review has taken into account the customers' perspective. Given the County-wide review has focused on Drugs and Alcohol, it was agreed that the Council's review should major on the other four main areas of Community Safety:

- ◆ Domestic Violence
- ◆ Anti-social behaviour
- ◆ Fear of crime
- ◆ Actual crime

5 COMMUNITY SAFETY ACTIVITY

- 5.1 The Rochford District Council Community Safety Team comprises of one full time Community Safety Officer and two Assistant part-time Community Safety Officers whose combined weekly hours exceed one working week.
- 5.2 Although the officers take a share in day to day community safety activity such as dealing with frequent neighbourhood complaints and disputes whilst also providing advice and mediation, they also specialise in key areas of work. For example, one of the part time workers specialises in advice with domestic violence whilst the other part time worker has expert knowledge on alcohol and illegal drugs.
- 5.3 This is reflected in the number of meetings and working groups that are attended. As well as Partnership meetings and their sub-groups, Drug Reference Groups, Domestic Violence Panels etc, the officers attend other related groups such as the Police and Community Consultative Group, Vulnerable Adult Group meetings, meetings in connection to 'Hate Crime' (crime affecting people due to their ethnic background, sexual persuasion and disability) and ad hoc residents meetings.
- 5.4 Whilst taking a lead role within the Rochford Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnership the Rochford District Council Community Safety Team does have a number of specific and exclusive responsibilities. The team provides most of the administrative support for the Partnership. It also financially manages the Partnership funds as well as supporting bids for funds to support crime and disorder reduction projects. The team also manages the Council's own Community Safety Fund which has financed a number of initiatives such as awareness leaflets, CCTV and issues in connection with domestic violence.

5.5 Within the authority the Community Safety Team demonstrates cross team working. Although internal communications can always be improved upon, the team does link in with other Rochford District Council plans as well as those from other agencies. For example, the Anti Social Behaviour Order protocol and domestic violence policy both have close links with Housing issues. In terms of youth diversionary projects the role of community safety is important in relation to Leisure initiatives such as the summer sports activities, teen shelters and playspaces.

6 CRIME AND DISORDER ISSUES - FEAR OF CRIME AND ACTUAL CRIME

- 6.1 In a recent publication, Community Safety Partnerships, the Audit Commission have highlighted many areas of public concern. It acknowledges that community safety is a complex issue and that it “relates to people’s sense of personal security and to their feelings of ease in the places that they live, work or spend leisure time”.
- 6.2 In respect of actual crime the Audit Commission states that in areas of low crime, such as Rochford District, the fear of becoming a victim of crime is disproportionately higher. It also states that there are a range of other issues that contribute to public concern, including vandalism, racial harassment and graffiti. Since many of these factors are covered by existing Council Services the performance of these services is crucial to the way that people judge levels of community safety.
- 6.3 As a result of the Best Value Review many areas were identified in connection with crime, fear of crime and where improvements should be sought to service delivery.
- 6.4 Neighbourhood Watch are active in the Rochford area. However the Newsletters, which are now financially supported by the Rochford Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnership through Home Office funding, give residents little information on current crime statistics. This can lead residents to draw on their own conclusions as to the extent of local crime and disorder.
- 6.5 The Police and Community Consultative Group (PCCG) hold two meetings a year in Rochford which are attended by Rochford Community Safety Officers. Members of the public attending are mostly from the Neighbourhood Watch and tend to be late middle aged and retired. It is clear that many of the concerns are that of alleged youth nuisances despite little police evidence to support it.

- 6.6 This highlights two things. Firstly, there is a perception by older people that young people are the perpetrators of the majority of crimes. Indeed, from a recent public questionnaire where forty percent of 868 respondents were aged over 65, youth nuisance was rated eighth from a list of eighteen concerns.
- 6.7 Although police statistics do not substantiate this perception, it does highlight a second point that more could be done to publicise the true level and nature of actual crime.
- 6.8 The Audit Commission states that the risk of becoming a victim of violent crime is lower than most people think. In fact it is young men aged between 16 to 24 who are most at risk of becoming a victim. This is confirmed locally by Essex Police Rayleigh Division.
- 6.9 In a recent national MORI survey many of the respondents said that better activities for teenagers was the most important improvement needed in their area. Reducing levels of both offending and victimisation involving young people is a key issue for the Partnership and one that the Community Safety Team and Rochford District Council have a great deal of involvement. However, it is also clear that the team could be doing more to dispel the view that most young people are the perpetrators of crime, by promoting positive images of young people and the low crime statistics in the District.
- 6.10 Vulnerability to bogus callers is an important issue for the Partnership and again one that the Community Safety Team is involved with. Although national figures have risen, the police maintain that there is a low rate of activity in Rochford. However there are no separate police statistics available from the figures given for burglary. Although the Community Safety Team informs the public through talks and roadshows it relies upon the Police and Trading Standards to notify us of spates of bogus caller activity. Again, by working harder with the media the team could better inform the public of the dangers.
- 6.11 The Rochford Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnership is currently focusing on 'Hate Crime' (crime affecting people due to their ethnic background, sexual persuasion and for disability). The Community Safety Team is working closely with the Hate Crime focus groups with an aim to encourage victims, or fear of becoming a victim, of crime to report incidents. The promotion of Domestic Violence as unacceptable and wrong in schools and the wider community has proven a successful approach. A similar approach is possible in connection with 'Hate Crime'.

- 6.12 Not all alleged incidents of crime are detected. It can sometimes be weeks before a suspected crime is reported, by which time there is no evidence to support the allegation. This is often the case in situations of suspected drug taking. However, anecdotal evidence is still important and the Community Safety Team have started to collate such information in order to identify problem areas and trends. This information can also be used to show where a fear of crime is greater, and where localised nuisance problems may lead to more serious actual crime in the future.
- 6.13 The Best Value Review has also highlighted the need for further support to intermediaries who give support to victims. The Council provides financial support for the Essex Women's Refuge, but none for Victim Support. Intermediaries have an important role in supporting victims of crime, a service Rochford District Council is unable to provide. However, for some small financial contribution, additional services could be provided.
- 6.14 In terms of quality of life issues and anti-social behaviour, there is again a conflict with available statistics and public concerns. For example, the Council records the expenditure for correction of damage to Council property. Although this is low it is unclear whether all the damage is deliberate. It also fails to detail damage to private properties. The Partnership has now set up a criminal damage sub group and better recording systems have been developed by the Rochford District Council Community Safety Team with an aim to record all reported incidents of vandalism and graffiti to public and private property.
- 6.15 As well as working more closely with the public the Community Safety Team have also forged greater contact with the Business sector. The Chambers of Trade now regularly attend the Partnership meetings and have been recently consulted on the installation of CCTV and on crime issues for the Home Office. In February of this year the Council received feedback from a business crime consultation in which 75 companies were contacted. One of the many responses was that less than 40% of crimes affecting businesses are reported, due to two reasons – the alleged lack of police response and the impact on business insurance rates. Initiatives to reduce business crime are being developed with Business representative organisations, particularly in relation industrial estates within the District.

7 CONCLUSIONS

- 7.1 As well as highlighting areas of improvement to the service delivered by the team and also areas for improvement the Best Value process has shown a need for a Community Safety Action Plan separate to the Partnership Crime and Disorder Reduction Strategy and action plan. This is to ensure that activities agreed by Rochford District Council are progressed in a timely way. A draft of this plan is attached as Appendix B.

8 RECOMENDATION

- 8.1 That the Committee consider this Best Value report on Community Safety, and subject to any comments, agree the Action Plan as set out in Appendix B.

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Appendix A

COUNTY BEST VALUE REVIEW OF COMMUNITY SAFETY - DRUGS AND ALCOHOL

- I. The Inspection concluded that the partnerships in Essex provide a 'good', two-star service that has promising prospects for improvement.
- II. They found that performance on Community Safety in Essex is 'good' because:
 - ◆ Community safety is a key priority and is reflected in the aims of Councils and the police, and these have set clear objectives to reduce crime and in particular drug and alcohol related crime. Other key agencies also share these clear objectives and there was found little evidence of duplication or uncoordinated effort.
 - ◆ Police performance compares well with similar police forces, and the performance of some Council services is amongst the best in England.
 - ◆ Despite some recent increases, overall levels of crime in the County remain low, and the good joint working between the police and councils contributes to this.
 - ◆ There is a high level of commitment and co-operation between all key agencies which contributes to effective partnership working. There is also a wide range of co-ordinated activities that are targeted at addressing drug and alcohol related issues.
- III. The key agencies in Essex have recognised and are addressing localised disorder problems related to drugs and alcohol, and there is some acknowledgement by local people that action is taking place and is having an effect:
 - ◆ Local crime and disorder in known 'hot spots' is being addressed through environmental improvements such as CCTV and designated 'alcohol-free' zones.
 - ◆ A wide range of community safety initiatives are in place – including schemes to tackle youth crime, drugs, anti-social behaviour and drinking – these are targeted to reach people and areas in most need, and there is some evidence that these are helping to reduce crime.

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- ◆ For very specific groups, e.g. drug abusers, key agencies are working closely to ensure these people receive the appropriate services. For example, the Drugs Action Team works with Education and Social Services to plan services aimed at addressing drug and alcohol related problems, and the arrest referral scheme is being extended to cover court appearances.
 - ◆ The extent of drug and alcohol abuse across Essex varies widely and so blanket action is not appropriate, but fear of crime is a consistent concern amongst residents. Here the partnerships and some key countywide services such as Education are running and extending school-based programmes as well as working with parents on a preventative basis.
- IV. However, the inspection did find some important aspects that need further work:
- ◆ Information-sharing between agencies needs to improve at a local level.
 - ◆ The partnerships do not always evaluate how successful their work is, and successful outcomes need to be promoted more positively to the public.
 - ◆ A higher priority should be given to reducing fear of crime.
- V. They found that there are **promising prospects for improvement** because:
- ◆ The best value review brought together some of the key organisations, police and councils, who have a key role in improving community safety in Essex. It has improved relationships between them, identified what works and established common goals so that they can work better together to reduce crime and disorder.
 - ◆ The best value review carried out by councils and the police identified important areas that need to improve with regards to drug and alcohol related crime.
- VI. With specific reference to the Rochford Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnership the inspection identified many strengths:
- ◆ Commitment at a strategic and operational level within the Council and the Police to deliver on the new Community Safety Strategy.

- ◆ Have a close working relationship with Castle Point – have several shared posts, a joint Health Trust and a joint chair of the Community Safety Partnerships.
- ◆ Used several inventive ways to engage with ethnic minority communities including churches, etc.
- ◆ Domestic violence – running parenting classes (now in second sitting for these and they are very popular).
- ◆ STAR project is developing diversionary activities with close help from the Parish Councils – aimed at young offenders.
- ◆ Alcohol and drugs are a major focus of police work in both primary and secondary schools. School children are confused with the legal position regarding to drugs (Cannabis). Police work closely with beat teams around issues such as underage drinking.
- ◆ Mainstreaming of community safety within the Council:
 - Community Safety implications covered in reports to committee.
 - Temporary contract staff trained about relevant CS issues.
 - Changing tenancy policies to address anti-social behaviour.
 - Parish representatives on Partnership body.
- ◆ ASBO protocol recently developed in partnership with Castle Point Borough Council.
- ◆ The partnership has established an evaluation group for projects and are well down the road towards target setting and monitoring performance against targets.
- ◆ Local Crime and Disorder issues – The police has just completed a gap analysis, comparing Castle Point CS Strategy, Rochford CS Strategy, BV action plan and the Divisional Policing Plan:
 - Has identified some areas within the division that need addressing – is looking to develop the role of beat officers and build a community policing capability, linked into the division's intelligence capability. Will also be looking to establish a stronger performance focus as well as a process for benchmarking the division against others in Essex and some other forces.

VII. Only one area for improvement was identified:

- ◆ Partnership structure is complex and would benefit from streamlining using guidance from the Audit Commission Learning from Inspection Report on Community Safety Partnerships.

Appendix B

Community Safety Action Plan

Best Value Review – Community Safety

Action Plan

Action	Timescale	Resources
Addressing fear of crime		
<p>Challenge media sensationalism of crime by promoting the relatively low levels experienced in the district</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Through provision of information to residents in Neighbourhood Watch newsletters • Provide advice and information sessions to community groups, particularly those vulnerable to crime, including young people • Investigate the potential to provide information and advice to young people through 57 South Street • By promoting positive images of young people in the community • Being proactive with local media in promoting good news stories relating to community safety, including use of Rochford District Matters (RDM) 	<p>Quarterly Newsletter</p> <p>As required. 15-20 Sessions per year</p> <p>September 2003</p> <p>2003/04</p> <p>Ongoing</p>	<p>Bid for £1000 2003/04 Home Office Funding</p> <p>Community Safety Team Information Packs</p> <p>Community Safety Team Information Packs</p> <p>Community Safety Team Communications Officer</p> <p>Community Safety Team Communications Officer Bid for Home Office funding of £1400 towards RDM 2003/04</p>

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Encourage zero tolerance to 'Hate Crime' and encourage people to report it to the Police by delivery of the Hate Crime Initiatives. • Provide information and advice such as leaflets and website updates on how people can reduce their vulnerability to crime such as graffiti, vandalism, litter, dog fouling, abandoned vehicles, decriminalisation of car parking • Record incidents of Crime and Disorder nuisance problems as reported to Rochford District Council to help identify trends and to be used to support Partnership initiatives when required. 	<p>2003/04</p> <p>Ongoing</p> <p>Completed</p>	<p>Home Office funding bid £2000 pa 2004/06</p> <p>Rochford District Council To be funded from Crime and Disorder Reserve. Estimate of £500 pa.</p> <p>Officer time</p>
<p>Support for victims of crime by supporting intermediaries</p>		
<p>Provide support for intermediaries by providing information</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Providing information to intermediaries on areas of neighbourhood dispute to provide mediation and advice (CAB mediation funded via Rochford District Council) - Providing information on where to gain advice and who does what – a Directory of Community Safety Information, Advice and Contacts. Make available via Rochford District Council website. 	<p>Establish by July 2003</p> <p>March 2004</p>	<p>Bid for Home Office funding of £1000 to CAB for debt management for youths in schools 2003/04</p> <p>Rochford District Council. To be funded from Crime and Disorder Reserve for 2003/04. Estimate of £2500</p>

<p>Provide financial support to intermediaries from the crime and disorder reserve where there are opportunities to extend the support given to victims of crime</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide funding to Victim Support to provide additional support (<i>to be advised on what exactly</i>) • Secure funding to provide a women's second stage accommodation refuge in the district (providing five move on places) • Provide funding towards a domestic violence outreach advice service in the district 	<p>2003/04</p> <p>2004/05</p> <p>2003/04</p>	<p>Bid for Home Office Funding £1500 in 2003/04</p> <p>Housing Corporation has now provided Swan Housing Group with a £310,000 social housing grant. Joint Rochford District Council and Castle Point Borough Council</p> <p>£9500 from Rochford District Council Homelessness Service Expenditure, Housing Services.</p>
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Partnership		
<p>To continue to work with partners to address crime and disorder issues as identified in the Crime and Disorder Reduction Strategy, and maximise the potential of Home Office Funding in the District.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Quantify and cost the resources provided by Rochford District Council to the Crime and Disorder Reduction Strategy to enable the Community Safety Team to target their work for the partnership and for the Council - Continue to work closely with Castle Point Borough Council and the Castle Point Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnership to jointly implement the Crime and Disorder Reduction Strategy, sharing costs and resources as appropriate - Continue to engage other partners, including new partners, in the leadership and implementation of the Crime and Disorder Reduction Strategy - With business representative organisations, develop initiatives to reduce business crime in the district 	<p>September 2003</p> <p>Ongoing</p> <p>Ongoing</p> <p>March 2004</p>	<p>Community Safety Team</p> <p>Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnership</p> <p>Community Safety Team Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnership</p> <p>Community Safety Team Economic Development Officer. A £4200 bid submitted to the Home Office for 2003/04</p>

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Consolidate relationships with Parishes to address local crime and disorder issues, Parish Conference, Parish crime and disorder reduction bids. - Work with Essex County Council Youth Service and the Crime and Disorder Partnership to provide diversionary projects to address youth nuisance in the area - With Partners, introduce greater project evaluation to Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnership and Rochford District Council schemes 	<p>Annual January - March 2003</p> <p>Ongoing</p> <p>Ongoing</p>	<p>A bid for Home Office funding of £1500 2003/04 to fund a conference. Parish bids of £9,600 from Home Office funding for security improvements in Stambridge and Hullbridge. 2003/04.</p> <p>Community Safety Team, Leisure Services, Youth Services.</p> <p>Officer time</p>
<p>To work with partner community safety teams and Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnerships in the County to address community safety issues as identified in County Community Safety Review - Drugs and Alcohol.</p>		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - With partners in the Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnership identify actions from the Best Value Process, which are irrelevant for Rochford and to be actioned 	<p>June 2003</p>	<p>To be identified from Home Office funding bids in 2003/04 & 2004/05</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - With partners in the Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnership identify resources required to implement the actions from the Best Value Process 	<p>June 2003</p>	<p>To be identified from Home Office funding bids in 2003/04 & 2004/05</p>

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Continue to work closely with Essex County Council and Castle Point Borough Council and the Drug Reference Group to jointly implement the Drug and Alcohol related Crime and Disorder Reduction Strategy, sharing costs and resources as appropriate 	Ongoing	Home Office Bid 2003/04 £16249 (plus joint funding with Castle Point Borough Council)
Rochford District Council working together to improve community safety		
<p>Continue to mainstream community safety in all aspects of the Councils work, to ensure activity is 'joined up' and consistent</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Corporate induction to Community Safety - Establish quarterly internal meetings of staff dealing with community safety issues to ensure that cross cutting issues are addressed, e.g. staff from housing, leisure, community planning, refuse collection, maintenance, economic development and environmental health and legal - Ensure all relevant staff are made aware of updates of the Crime and Disorder Reduction Strategy and associated actions - Use the Community Safety Service Action Plan, linked to other Departmental Service Action Plans and the Corporate Plan, to focus the work of the team, to ensure that RDC priorities are addressed in a timely way - Agree the aim of the Council's community safety service and agree a range of performance measures to be reviewed annually 	<p>Establish by December 2003</p> <p>June/Sept/Dec/April</p> <p>Bi-annual</p> <p>Annual</p> <p>September 2003</p>	<p>Community Safety Team</p> <p>Officer time</p> <p>Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnership</p> <p>Community Safety Team</p> <p>Community Safety Team</p>

