

COMMUNITIES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Minutes of a meeting of the Communities Scrutiny Committee held on Tuesday 11 October 2022 at 6.00 pm in The Telford Room, Addenbrooke House, Ironmasters Way, Telford, TF3 4NT

Present: Councillors C R Turley (Chair), E J Carter and T L B Janke

Also Present: Councillors R A Overton (Cabinet Member: Housing, Enforcement and Transport) and P Watling (Cabinet Member: Safer and Stronger Communities)

In Attendance: A Astley (Executive Director: Housing, Communities & Customer Services), E Harvey (Lead Lawyer: Property & Commercial), A Hunt (Group Manager: Public Protection), K Robinson (Democracy Officer (Scrutiny)), D Sargeant (Director: Neighbourhood & Enforcement Services), and M Tolhurst (Group Manager: Safer Stronger Communities)

COMSC54 Apologies for Absence

None.

COMSC55 Declarations of Interest

None.

COMSC56 Minutes of the Previous Meeting

RESOLVED - that the minutes of the meeting held on 28 June 2022 be confirmed and signed by the Chair.

COMSC57 Work Programme Review

There were no comments on the work programme.

COMSC58 Trading Standards Overview

The Public Protection Group Manager presented the report.

Trading Standards had a wide remit, covering over 200 pieces of consumer protection legislation. Everything bought was covered in some way by trading standards.

Activities of the team were intelligence led; an example of this were the 2500 contacts from Citizens Advice. The team then investigated the issues reported

to Citizens Advice. Other local partners and regulators such as the police also shared information. Where trends emerged in terms of themes, businesses, and individuals, they were investigated.

In the preceding 12 months, the team had seized 30,000 cigarettes, 1500 illegal vapes, and 500 items of counterfeit clothing as well as carrying out test purchasing of restricted goods with a 50% pass rate for businesses. In total, £70,000 worth of illegal goods had been seized.

Significant work was being undertaken in terms of rogue traders. There had been 50 complaints about doorstep cold calling in the past year. In response to the issue, the Council operates and promotes a trading standards trader accreditation scheme to provide advice on reputable traders. In addition, the team had provided support to 30 vulnerable scam victims. This was aided by community engagement work on avoiding scams.

The team's priorities for the next 12 months were set out for the committee:

- Illegal and counterfeit tobacco and vaping products
- Consumer and construction product safety
- Door step crime, rogue traders and scams
- False and misleading trading practices
- Animal health & welfare, disease control and animal feeds
- 'Back to basics' projects – goods sold by weights and measures.

Following the presentation, Members posed a number of questions:

Did the Council work with HMRC in recovering counterfeit goods?

The Council did work with HMRC, tobacco was a key issue and there is specific funding that the Council receive from HMRC for this.

There was particular concern around underage vaping, what was being done to combat this specifically?

Underage sales were an issue, the team were looking to visit all premises selling vapes, providing advice, and making sure they sold safe vapes. Some vape sellers did not sell other restricted products and so did not have an established Challenge policy in place.

How often were purchase tests carried out?

Test purchase operations were complex to set up, as the team had to take into account the child volunteer's health and safety and ensure a chaperone was in place. More operations to test the sale of vaping products were planned.

Who was responsible for dealing with aggressive doorstep traders?

A number of agencies could assist, however, if people rang the Council or Citizens Advice they would try to get somebody to the individual as quickly as possible if it was urgent. Alternatively, the resident can call the police if they feel concerned about their safety.

How were non-internet users to get in touch?

Citizens Advice provided a consumer advice line that could be accessed by internet or telephone. Anything reported to them would be shared with Trading Standards and the intelligence logged. People could also contact the Council's contact centre.

Members requested an update the following year.

Upon being put to a vote, it was:

RESOLVED – that the Committee

- a) Endorse the approach adopted by the Trading Standards in the previous twelve months; and**
- b) Agree and approve identified priorities and areas of focus for the year ahead and suggest any areas of focus for further consideration.**

COMSC59 Safer Stronger Communities Update

The Safer Stronger Communities Group Manager presented the report.

The Safer Stronger Communities initiative consisted of a £2.5m two year investment programme, which included £500,000 from the Police and Crime Commissioner. The scheme focussed on 12 primary areas across Telford, identified through intelligence and data that picked out areas of relative deprivation and high unemployment. This was a multi-agency approach to tackling the root cause of crime. Investment was shaped by the Building Safer Stronger Communities delivery plan.

In terms of communication, there had been a significant reach via as many channels as possible. These included social media, neighbourhood apps, and local and national media coverage. Additionally, all residents in target areas had received mail shots prior to the local launch of the scheme.

Members heard some of the outcomes that the scheme, as already implemented, had delivered. Examples included improved street lighting and expanded hedge cutting to improve residents' sense of safety, the installation of CCTV to deter fly tipping, and the rollout of activities to engage young people, such as Friday Night Football.

A comprehensive dashboard was being developed to record metrics such as

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- Levels of recorded crimes
- Levels of anti-social behaviour
- Fly tipping
- Unemployment levels
- Police confidence

- Perception of safety

A discussion followed with Members posing questions:

Had there been a change in strategy to tackling fly tipping?

There was a need to be seen to be taking action. Looking at places where fly tipping was common, it was also necessary to understand why it happened. This allowed officers to consider how to prevent fly tipping. A Waste Education Officer had been hired to work with families on their waste situations.

How were difficult to reach young people, such as 14-16 year olds, to be reached?

This was a difficult issue but schemes such as Friday Night Football were targeted at them. There was a need to engage these young people, though a common issue was that they did not necessarily know what it was they wanted in terms of provision.

Following a discussion on Prevent, Members requested an update on the scheme.

On being put to a vote, it was:

RESOLVED – that the Committee

- a) Endorse the approach taken in delivering the Building Safer and Stronger Communities investment to date and offer areas for further consideration;**
- b) Note the proactive approach to promoting and communicating the Building Safer and Stronger Communities Programme and offer suggestion for further consideration; and**
- c) Note the continued roll out of this investment and the programme going forward.**

COMSC60 Chair's Update

The Chair advised the date of the next meeting would be 15 November 2022.

The meeting ended at 6.53 pm

Chairman:

Date: Tuesday 15 November 2022