

Committee	Date	Classification	Report No.	Agenda No.	Item
Overview and Scrutiny	08 January 2008	Unrestricted		10.1	
Report of: Assistant Chief Executive Originating Officer(s): Ashraf Ali Scrutiny Policy Officer			Title: Scrutiny Challenge Session – Evaluation of the effectiveness of Safer Neighbourhood Teams Ward(s) affected: All		

1. Summary

- 1.1 This report updates the Overview and Scrutiny Committee on the outcome of the Scrutiny Challenge Session on Evaluation of the effectiveness of Safer Neighbourhood Teams held on 3rd December 2007.

2. Recommendation

- 2.1 The Overview and Scrutiny Committee is asked to note the outcome of the Scrutiny Challenge Session on Evaluation of the effectiveness of Safer Neighbourhood Teams.

LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT, 2000 (SECTION 97)

LIST OF “BACKGROUND PAPERS” USED IN THE PREPARATION OF THIS REPORT

Background paper

None

Name and telephone number of and address where open to inspection

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3. Introduction

3.1 This report provides a summary of the Scrutiny Challenge Session which considered the effectiveness of Safer Neighbourhood Teams.

3.2 Challenge sessions are designed as a quick way for a group of members to get to grips with key policy issues and ensure a robust check on the Council's policies. The session was attended by a group of five members led by the Scrutiny Lead for Living Safely, Cllr Salim Ullah.

4. Purpose

4.1 The purpose of the scrutiny challenge session was to:

- Increase understanding and awareness of the Safer Neighbourhood Teams in Tower Hamlets;
- Suggest ways of increasing Member and community involvement;
- Provide a critical friend challenge to the Council's approach to working with Safer Neighbourhood Teams.

4.2 The Group received a presentation from Andy Bamber (Service Head Community Services) and Rob Revill (Chief Inspector, Metropolitan Police Service) outlining the national and local policy context and the current position and performance of the Safer Neighbourhood Teams.

5. Background

5.1 In 1993 the Mayor Rudolph Giuliani introduced the concept of 'zero tolerance'. The New York Police Department aggressively targeted minor offences in an attempt to deter more serious crimes; the result was the lowest crime rate for 25 years. In London the Metropolitan Police committed itself to a new kind of policing similar to the zero tolerance model known as 'Safer Neighbourhoods'. As a locally based project this would seek to involve community police officers and regular policemen to deliver;

- A team of officers dedicated to every London neighbourhood by 2007;
- A more accessible, more visible, more accountable policing presence.

5.2 The Safer Neighbourhood policing scheme was created at a time when overall recorded crime had been falling for several years, but at the same time, public confidence in policing was also falling. Safer Neighbourhood Teams (SNTs) were designed to bridge this gap by providing a visible presence and reconnecting local people with the police. It aimed to allow local communities an opportunity to have a real say in deciding the priorities for the area in which they live, allowing the police to provide long-term solutions to local problems while maintaining a focus on reducing crime.

5.3 The main role of the SNTs is work with priorities set by the public. These priorities often demand a long term problem-solving approach, working in partnership in order to create efficient solutions. Since April 2007 the SNTs have been involved in 26 long term problem solving issues consisting of the following; ASB, Drink, Drugs, Mopeds, Motor Vehicle crime, Fires and Criminal Damage.

6 About Tower Hamlets Safer Neighbourhood Teams

- 6.1 Crime still remains at the top of the list of concerns for most residents in Tower Hamlets. The Tower Hamlets Safer Neighbourhoods proposal was designed to find a sustainable solution to address the concern and the reasons for it.
- 6.2 The teams are overseen by ward-based steering groups made up of residents and service providers, whose role it is to ensure that local residents have a direct and regular say on what they want to see tackled in their area, and to involve them in deciding local solutions to issues identified.
- 6.3 The officers in the Safer Neighbourhood Teams spend most of their time out on patrol meeting the community and identifying and dealing with those crimes and issues that cause residents most concern. SNTs usually consist of one sergeant, two constables and three police community support officers (PCSOs) working in each of the borough's 17 wards.
- 6.4 SNTs are trained to communicate with a wide range of people, communities and partners, to tackle and solve community problems. These are most likely to be quality-of-life issues, such as anti-social behaviour, criminal damage, abandoned cars and graffiti.
- 6.5 Tower Hamlets performance against MPS/Performance Information Bureau (PIB) for the period between April 2007 and November 2007 show the following indicators were on target for reduction: robbery per person, theft per person, burglary, rape and gun crime.
- 6.6 Tower Hamlets performance against Local Partnership targets show that for the same period between April 2007 and November 2007 the following indicators were also on target for reduction: burglary, rape and gun crime.

7 Better Tower Hamlets Teams

- 7.1 In January 2007 the Better Tower Hamlets Teams was introduced to bring together service providers at a local level to have a greater impact on tackling residents' community safety concerns. The teams in general consist of the Safer Neighbourhood Team, staff from council environmental services, anti-social behaviour case investigation teams, drugs outreach workers and, where appropriate, registered social landlords and neighbourhood managers. They work closely and support the delivery of responses to local crime and anti-social behaviour. Their role is to make mainstream service delivery more effective in tackling local problems.

8 Discussion and Recommendations

- 8.1 The Scrutiny Challenge Session provided an opportunity for Members to raise a number of issues and there was a wide ranging discussion. Following the discussions Members proposed a number of recommendations.
- 8.2 The Group's discussion mainly focused on improving the presence of SNTs in the local community. SNTs should provide reassurance to problems that affect the quality

of life of residents in the community and should involve officers having a presence in the community achieved through visible foot patrol.

- 8.3 The Scrutiny Group felt that trust appeared to be diminishing in the community as a result of limited contact between SNTs and residents. Residents had reported to Members that difficulties in getting a response from teams had resulted in them using the emergency numbers to contact the police.

R1 Improve visibility of SNTs in the community

- 8.4 While the Group acknowledged that some elected councillors are in direct contact with the local SNT this is not the case in all wards.
- 8.5 Members identified the need to have better partnership working arrangements with local schools, mosques, churches and Tenants Associations. This would help to ensure a better coordinated approach to tackling crime.
- 8.6 The Group also noted the comments of Andy Bamber (Service Head Community Safety Services) who explained that a meeting is to be set up between the Tower Hamlets Partnership and the Borough Commander to discuss the topic of SNTs. All Members were encouraged to join this meeting to help raise awareness and offer an opportunity for Members to meet those who are in charge of policing in their Wards.

R2: That SNTs identify ways of improving engagement with local councillors, residents and the wider Partnership.

- 8.7 Members recognised that SNTs are in place to tackle community problems such as anti-social behaviour, criminal damage, abandoned cars and graffiti. The Group also appreciated that SNTs would be involved in raids or other operations in their wards. However, there is a fine line between involving SNTs in these activities and taking the place of other officers involved in them. The Group was strongly of the view that SNTs should principally be tasked with visible patrolling and liaison with the local community. Members also noted anecdotal evidence of variations in performance between different SNTs.

R3: LBTH should monitor closely the work of SNTs to ensure that they remain focussed on their principle tasks and are not distracted by wider policing objectives. The Head of SNTs should produce an annual report of SNT activities in each ward, including performance against Public Set Priorities. This report should be made available to the public.

- 8.8 The Group recognised that, as with other public services, recruitment and retention are key issues facing Safer Neighbourhood Teams. However, Members are especially concerned that high rates of turnover amongst SNT police officers and PCSOs can make it extremely difficult to build and sustain relationships with the local community.
- 8.9 Whilst Members acknowledge that Police Sergeants and PCSOs will seek other career opportunities and regular moves between postings, The group agreed that better planning can help anticipate recruitment and retention issues before they arise.

R4; That the local police service identify ways to improve recruitment to and retention within SNTs of both PCs and PCSOs.

8.10 Members agreed that, if they are to achieve and sustain a significant reduction in crime and disorder and ensure that residents feel safer, the overall level of policing will need to increase. An expanded SNT should be a key element within this increased Borough Police Service. This will obviously cost more than is currently available in the MPA budget and is therefore dependent upon political decisions made beyond Tower Hamlets itself. Nevertheless, LBTH is not without influence at a regional level. In the meantime, Members noted that London Borough of Tower Hamlets used Neighbourhood Renewal Funding to roll-out SNTs ahead of other London Boroughs, and suggested that further funding could be identified from within existing budgets if community safety was felt to be the key concern of local residents and businesses.

R5: LBTH should press the Home Secretary, Mayor of London and Metropolitan Police Commander to increase the size of each SNT.

R6: LBTH should consider recommending whether Tower Hamlets Partnership should apply more of its Working Neighbourhood Funding (ex-NRF) to facilitate the introduction of a floating SNT to support ward-based teams experiencing particular local difficulties.

8 Conclusion

9.1 The Safer Neighbourhood Teams have made a real impact in reducing crime and anti-social behaviour. However, public perceptions, most notably the fear of crime, continue to lag stubbornly behind the reality. A high-profile police presence will help ease some of those fears and reduce crime and disorder. Now that the SNTs have bedded in, LBTH should look to secure consistent improvements in performance from them, focus them on their key objectives and examine the potential to expand the size of the teams in future.

10. Concurrent Report of the Assistant Chief Executive (Legal)

10.1 There are no direct legal implications of this report.

11. Comments of the Chief Financial Officer

11.1 There are no direct financial implications arising from this report.

12. Equal Opportunity Implications

12.1 Effectively tackling crime is an important step to improving equality as it is often the most vulnerable members of the community who are victims. Proper monitoring of victims should enable more refined targeting of resources to ensure this happens. At the same time it is important to ensure that policies and practices do not victimise certain individuals due to their race, gender, sexual orientation, faith, disability or age.

13. Anti-Poverty Implications

13.1 The poorest members of the community are more likely to be victims of crime. Effective detection and crime prevention therefore sits alongside other anti-poverty initiatives to improve the quality of life for residents.

14. Sustainable Action for a Greener Environment

14.1 There are no direct risk management implications arising from this report.

15. Risk Management

15.1 There are no direct risk management implications arising from this report.