

Fermanagh and Omagh District Council
Fermanagh and Omagh Policing and Community Safety Partnership

Policing Committee Meeting

Minutes of the Fermanagh and Omagh Policing and Community Safety Partnership Policing Committee meeting held on Tuesday 30 June 2020 at 6 pm via Teleconference.

Present: Councillors

John McClaughry (Chairperson), Paul Blake, Josephine Deehan, Keith Elliott, Barry McElduff, Thomas O'Reilly and Allan Rainey.

Independent Members

Monica Coyle (Vice-Chairperson), Noeleen Hayes, Norman Kirkpatrick, Vida Lake, Bernie McCrory, Margaret McCrory, Sarah McQuaid, Maria Thompson and Pauline Treacy.

Designated Members

Superintendent Clive Beatty (PSNI), Paul Devlin (PBNI), Brian Hetherington (NIFRS) and Ryan McGee (EANI).

Apologies: Sinead Dolan (YJA) and Oonagh McAvinney (NIHE).

In attendance: Carol Follis (PCSP Manager), Rory Hoy (PSNI), Roy Robinson (PSNI) and Maggie McManus (Committee Clerk).

PCSP 01/20

Welcome and Apologies

The Chairperson welcomed Members of the Policing Committee and apologies were accepted. The Chairperson introduced the new Chairperson Councillor John McClaughry and expressed his thanks to PCSP Members and staff for their support during his tenure.

The PCSP Manager introduced the five new Independent Members who had been appointed following the reconstitution process.

PCSP 02/20

Declarations of Interest

No declarations of interest were declared.

PCSP 03/20

Notification of AOB

Councillor Barry McElduff requested further clarification on the use of Notification of AOB.

PCSP 04/20

Minutes

The minutes of the Policing Committee meeting held in public on Tuesday 25 February 2020 were considered and approved. Proposed by Councillor Allan Rainey and seconded by Councillor Paul Blake.

PCSP 05/20

Matters Arising

No matters arising from the minutes.

Members' Questions

The following questions and responses were circulated to Members in advance of the meeting.

Question 1 Councillor John McClaughry

Can senior police explain to the people in Kesh what the difference between a peaceful protest and a horde of drunken youths is? Why was one group prosecuted or issued fixed penalty notices and the other group not?

Response Superintendent Beatty

Without specifics, it is difficult to give an exact response to the issue raised, however, these are not normal policing times. The PSNI adopted the College of Policing graduated response to dealing with breaches of The Health Protection Regulations – Engagement, Education, Encouragement, Enforcement. Fermanagh and Omagh enjoy being one of the lowest positive Covid-19 regions, which reflects the measured policing response adopted to ensure that enforcement was only considered as a last resort as opposed to a first reaction. Fixed Penalty Notices were only issued once Engagement, Education and Encouragement failed to achieve a positive outcome and we have not issued any Fixed Penalty Notices since 14th of May 2020.

The Chairperson asked if there was any further update to report. Superintendent Beatty stated he would liaise with a senior officer and respond directly to the Member.

Question 2 Councillor Donal O'Cofaigh

I have heard first-hand accounts from a number of young people who attended the recent socially distanced anti-racism protest at Gaol Square on Monday June 8th in Enniskillen. Despite the entirely peaceful and socially distanced nature of their protest, the accounts convey a sense of repressive zeal by Police officers who were openly videoing participants as well as giving them aggressive stares and seeking to intimidate.

Those in attendance were instructed to disperse at 3pm despite the fact that there was no obvious public safety concern. They were threatened that if they remained, they would be subject to a fine and were forced to scatter as they felt they were being pursued.

These individuals mobilised despite concerns about the potential consequence to their own safety to show solidarity to the global movement against racial oppression and US police brutality. In so doing, they were standing for fundamental civil and human rights, rather than be subject to intimidatory policing they should have been respected.

I understand that while the protest did not involve speeches, chants, indeed was silent throughout the 90 minutes, and it was entirely socially-distanced outdoors, the only people who broke social-distancing were Members of the police themselves who intervened with the clear intention of intimidating young people, many of whom were attending their first ever protest. This is

unacceptable and totally undermines confidence of a new generation in policing.

Can I ask whether you will investigate the aggressive approach taken to policing this protest? Why was this a priority for policing when other gatherings of people which often are not socially distanced are not aggressively policed?

Response Superintendent Beatty

I refer to the statement of the Gold Commander for Covid-19, ACC Alan Todd.

In other times, we would have worked with the organisers and protesters to facilitate lawful and peaceful protests to mark the avoidable and unnecessary death of George Floyd, however these are not ordinary times.

The Health Protection Regulations are in place to protect us all during this pandemic and it is everyone's responsibility to adhere to them to protect our society and do everything we can to stop the spread of Covid-19. I would continue to urge everyone to be mindful of the Regulations and their personal responsibility to follow them in order to save lives and support the NHS.

As essential workers, officers should maintain social distancing rules where practicable and operationally possible, however it will not always be possible for officers to do so to fulfil their operational role of keeping people safe. Officers are not required to wear face masks at all times. Specific advice adopted from the guidance issued by the National Police Chiefs' Council, and which is agreed by Public Health Agencies, has been issued to advise officers and staff on the wearing of PPE.

The approach on the date in question is fully compliant with that guidance.

Should any individual feel that they have personally been aggression or intimidation, then they should make a complaint to the Police Ombudsman for thorough impartial investigation.

PCSP 07/20

12 Month Report on the Implementation of the Local Policing Plan 2019-2020

Superintendent Beatty highlighted some of the main points from the Local Policing Plan 2019-20.

- an increase of 209 crime incidents from previous year.
- 352 burglaries reported an increase of 72 from the previous year.
- increase in the number of Neighbourhood Policing Teams so that all electoral areas have a dedicated team.
- G district has the lowest rate of recorded hate crime with 57 hate crimes recorded in the year.

- 7.5% decrease in the number of anti-social behaviour incidents. Traditional anti-social behaviour on the decrease with a trend for digital anti-social behaviour.
- domestic abuse related crime up 30 crimes from the previous year.
- cyber motivated crime is on the increase r is a new hidden crime with perpetrators all across the world. There was an increase of 57 reported incidents in the last 12 months.

The Chairperson thanked Superintendent Beatty for his report and invited the Members to ask questions.

Members raised the following questions:

Question 1

Councillor Josephine Deehan asked what statistics are available on the outcomes of reported domestic violence incidents. She also queried the number of victims who withdraw the allegation and, in this case, can a file go to the PPS.

Response

Superintendent Beatty said that a criminal justice outcome could be as low as a community resolution notice right up to charge by prosecution going through the courts. He added that many victims do not necessarily seek criminal justice but seek freedom from their situation which is where organisations such as Women’s Aid and MAN can assist. He confirmed that where a criminal offence has alleged to have occurred files are forwarded to the PPS who is responsible for taking the decision on prosecution.

Question 2

Councillor Allan Rainey asked if there are any weak links in the supply of drugs and what can the PSNI do to prevent the supply worldwide wherever it originates.

Response

Superintendent Beatty said dealers are very ingenious in moving drugs into the district and are becoming sophisticated in making drugs at home hindering seizures and arrests although there had been some significant results during lockdown. He added that community intelligence is key and NPTs play an important part in building relationships and trust with communities to gather said intelligence.

Question 3

Councillor Thomas O’Reilly asked if experiences from Covid-19 have raised the difficulties in getting the message/advice through to people from other countries and how could PCSP/PSNI better interact with people from other countries.

Response

Superintendent Beatty advised that the PSNI has a good working relationship with Omagh Ethnic Communities Support Group and acknowledged that it is difficult to reach out and engage with all groups in the district. He added that it is worthwhile exploring this further. This was proposed by Councillor Thomas O'Reilly and seconded by Councillor Allan Rainey to explore opportunities to engage with ethnic minority groups in the district.

Recommended:

That the PCSP Manager provide an update at a future meeting.

Question 4

Councillor Thomas O'Reilly asked for clarification on the increase in possession of weapons.

Response

Superintendent Beatty clarified that a weapon is classified as anything that could be used/made/adapted and intended to cause injury to another person or persons. He added that there is no pandemic of knife crime in the district.

Question 5

Councillor Thomas O'Reilly asked if there had been an increase in the number of hard drugs deposited in the RAPID bins. With possession of weapons on the increase, could Rapid bins be expanded to more sites to take in weapons?

Response

Superintendent Beatty stated that he did not have figures relating to drugs seized from RAPID Bins and asked the PCSP Manager to circulate information to the Members. During his response he confirmed that RPAID Bins are not designed for the disposal of knives.

Recommended:

That the PCSP Manager circulate information on drugs seized from RAPID Bins.

Question 6

Councillor Thomas O'Reilly asked if there was any guidance available from the PSNI on MOT exemptions.

Response

Superintendent Beatty said that he would ask colleagues in Roads Policing to post information on facebook.

Question 7

Councillor Donal O'Cofaigh asked if there was any narrative from the PSNI on the scale of harassment in the district.

Response

Superintendent Beatty responded that the way that harassment is recorded changed eighteen months ago. Previously it was recorded after two occasions now it is on the first occasion and this is reflected in the statistics.

Question 8

Councillor Donal O’Cofaigh asked if there was any intelligence that drug dealing in the district is associated with paramilitarism.

Response

Superintendent Beatty confirmed that this is more prevalent in other parts of Northern Ireland but that the PSNI is not naïve that there may be paramilitary involvement but there is no evidence of this.

Question 9

Councillor Donal O’Cofaigh asked the PSNI response if a person is found in possession of a weapon.

Response

Superintendent Beatty clarified that where this is found the criminal justice process applies.

Question 10

Councillor Donal O’Cofaigh asked if there any information on the number of trafficking/exploitation gangs in the area.

Response

Superintendent Beatty responded that trafficking is very much a hidden crime and that it is difficult to obtain local statistics. Added to this the language barrier and fear can impact on reporting.

Question 11

Councillor Donal O’Cofaigh asked if more information/guidelines relating to the PSNI interactions with people/groups regarding to Covid-19 is available.

Response

Superintendent Beatty responded that the role of the PSNI over the last few months is both challenging and evolving as restrictions change. He clarified that regardless of the restrictions the fundamental role of the PSNI is to keep people safe and prevent harm.

Question 12

Councillor Donal O’Cofaigh asked if the PSNI has a role in the workplace in respect of overloaded vehicles.

Response

Superintendent Beatty confirmed that the PSNI does not have a remit in the workplace. On public space the PSNI works closely with colleagues in Roads Policing and the DVLA to deliver joint operations.

Question 13

Councillor Barry McElduff asked Superintendent Beatty if he felt the Covid-19 crisis and the resultant economic hardship would see an increase in crime.

Response

Superintendent Beatty replied that he is unsure of what to expect but did highlight that with easing of travel restrictions can expect to see an increase of movement of criminal gangs.

Question 14

Noeleen Hayes asked if cameras erected on lampposts around the County (e.g. Florencecourt and Irvinestown) are PSNI cameras and what for what purpose.

Response

Superintendent Beatty said that he could not comment on the cameras in the areas mentioned but the PSNI have several cameras dotted across the County, which have vehicle number plate recognition and are used to gather information.

Question 15

Councillor John McClaughry asked if legal highs have disappeared off the streets.

Response

Superintendent Beatty advised that legal highs are still available, but that prescription drugs and party bags are now the drugs of choice.

The Chairperson thanked Superintendent Beatty for his report and diligence in answering questions from the Members.

Recommended:

That the Partnership notes the report.

PCSP 08/20

3 Month Update on the Local Policing Plan 2021-2021

Superintendent Beatty informed the meeting that due to Covid-19 the 3-month update report is not in the usual format. He presented statistics with narrative at DEA level. He confirmed his intent to provide information on the NPTs at future meetings.

Recommended:

That the Partnership notes the report.

PCSP 09/20

AOB

Councillor Barry McElduff requested further clarification on the use of Notification of AOB. The PCSP Manager responded that this was to manage the practice of Members raising issues that are not agenda items.

Requesting Members to notify items of AOB assists with managing meetings making them more efficient.

The Chairperson wished everyone a good summer recess and informed the Members that while it is hoped meetings from September will be in person the PCSP will be informed by restrictions current at the time.

The PCSP Manager stated that throughout the summer recess period relevant information would be sent to the Members and encouraged Members to contact her with any PCSP related business.