

RESPONSE TO THE REPORT AND RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE ANTI-SOCIAL BEHAVIOUR TASK & FINISH GROUP

Cabinet Member: Councillor Graham Peart

Wards Affected: All

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PROPOSED DECISION

That the responses to the recommendations made by the Improvement & Review Commission (IRC) through its Anti-Social Behaviour Task & Finish Group as set out below be agreed.

Reason for Decision

To respond to the recommendations made by the Anti-Social Behaviour Task & Finish Group.

Corporate Implications

1. There are no significant corporate implications arising from this report. There is a financial impact related to Recommendation 6, which will be considered as part of the Council's budget setting process.

Executive Summary

2. The IRC established a Task & Finish Group to look at anti-social behaviour across the District and how support could be provided to ensure that the Council achieved its objectives in this regard.
3. The recommendations from the Group (and IRC) were noted by Cabinet on 17 September 2018, with a commitment that a further report be presented to Cabinet in due course.

Sustainable Community Strategy/Council Priorities - Implications

4. Community Safety is a key strand for the Council in delivering against its People priority.

Background and Issues

5. The Improvement and Review Commission set up a Task and Finish Group to answer the question 'Is there a problem with anti-social behaviour in the District, and if so what can Wycombe District Council do about it?'
6. The task and finish group was established following a motion by the Leader of the Council to the Council and a resolution of Council that the matter should be considered.

7. Following the decision by Council the Improvement and Review Commission met to set up a Task and Finish Group to look into antisocial behaviour in the district. The ASB Task and Finish Group (T&FG) was established by the Improvement and Review Commission.

The Recommendations and Responses

The ASB Task and Finish Group had 10 recommendations, as follows.

The T&FG recommended that:

Wycombe District Council

Recommendation 1

WDC demonstrates its commitment to tackling ASB by:

- a) Appointing a Cabinet Member (or Deputy Cabinet Member) with specific responsibility for ASB, and that progress is reviewed at every Cabinet meeting.
- b) Identifying a single officer with lead responsibility for ASB, to be responsible for monitoring and reporting progress on tackling ASB.

Cabinet Response

The Council already has a Cabinet Member with specific responsibility for ASB, namely the Cabinet Member for Community Services. The Council also has a representative on the Police and Crime Panel, Cllr David Carroll. The Cabinet Member and Cllr Carroll both attend the Community Safety Strategy Group and receive three-monthly updates from the Police on ASB. IRC receives an annual presentation on crime and ASB within the District.

We will increase the frequency of the Community Safety Strategy Group meetings to bi-monthly as a demonstration of our commitment to a close working relationship with Thames Valley Police in particular. ASB is one among many issues that touch our residents, they cannot all be reported on at every Cabinet meeting and we propose that the Cabinet Member for Community has discretion to update Cabinet as and when he sees fit.

The Head of Community Services chairs the Community Safety Strategy Group and has the lead officer responsibility for community safety and ASB. It is not considered necessary or beneficial to move staff between Community and Environment to align them with the lead officer. The TFG itself acknowledges that this does not negatively impact on day to day work as officers work well together.

This recommendation is already supported.

Recommendation 2

That the working of the Community Safety Partnership be reviewed and tightened up to provide a stronger focus on tackling ASB through the relevant Portfolio holder and Lead officer identified in recommendation 1 above.

Cabinet Response

The Council has two different, complementary roles in relation to crime and ASB. One relates to strategy, overall direction and planning of resources and is the role performed by the Community Safety Strategy Group. The other relates to the daily,

weekly and monthly allocation of staff to achieve specific tasks. This second role is carried out in partnership with TVP, via their close working with the WDC ASB Officer. It is not the role of the Strategy Group to tackle ASB on a daily basis. For information a map of the partnership landscape is provided at Appendix A.

ASB has consistently been one of the strategic priorities set out in each annual plan – it is not a sign of failure that it has remained so but of our continued focus on this as an issue of great importance to our residents. Cabinet knows that we have comparatively low levels of ASB but we are not complacent in our commitment to reduce levels still further.

The TFG cites the presence of other priorities in the annual plan as a sign that the focus on ASB is insufficiently strong. Residents expect us to address more than one area of work at a time and are perfectly right to do so. Cabinet cannot accept that we should lessen our focus on other significant crime types, such as domestic abuse, exploitation of the vulnerable, cybercrime, to solely focus on ASB.

This recommendation is partially supported in that the frequency of meetings of the CSSG will be increased to bi-monthly. It is hoped that the partnership map allays some of the concerns the TFG has about the focus on tasking.

Recommendation 3

WDC improve the quality of data and information in relation to ASB by

- a) Creating its own database of incidents from all partners, subject to appropriate data sharing considerations, similar to the Police Repeat ASB/Signal Crime Callers and Locations report,¹ plotting their locations precisely on a map, indicating exactly where and when they occurred.
- b) Developing performance measures to enable progress in tackling ASB to be monitored.

Cabinet response

The primary point of contact for members of the public reporting incidents of ASB is TVP. WDC and housing providers in the District together will have a much smaller volume of ASB reported to them in comparison. WDC could employ a data officer to collate data from housing providers who may have a much lower volume of incidents reported but the value of WDC collecting this data is uncertain. The TFG notes issues with how data is recorded by TVP call handlers but it is unreasonable to suggest that WDC has a role in addressing this when only TVP can do so in reality. Cabinet considers that while the Council would know that the true figure is slightly higher than that reported to TVP our focus must be on working with TVP to address the majority of ASB incidents that we actually have a mandate and ability to deal with. The ASB Officer works on an average of 20-30 incidents per month but over half of these were initially reported to TVP and are being dealt with in partnership with TVP.

TVP can plot data on maps for the majority of ASB incidents across the District and it is uncertain what benefit would be provided by WDC duplicating this. Under GDPR locations need to be suitably anonymised so that individuals cannot be identified.

TVP and WDC already set partnership targets to reduce current reported levels of crime and ASB, although the national and local trend is for increasing levels of both so recommendation 3b is already supported.

Recommendation 3a is not supported.

Recommendation 4

WDC consider the implications and options for closing public toilets on an experimental basis and also consider whether pubs and local businesses could be encouraged to allow members of the public to use their toilet facilities when needed.

Cabinet Response

Some of the public conveniences operated by the Council, particularly in High Wycombe town centre, are prone to anti-social behaviour, and are frequented by drug users. The frequency of this type of abuse of the facilities is variable (and in some cases appears to be seasonal) and further work will be undertaken to identify the worst. Investigative work will be undertaken by officers with the BidCo and town centre businesses to identify the potential for customer toilets to be made available for use by the wider public. The Council could positively publicise and provide information about those businesses that are willing to be part of any such scheme, and signage to identify these participating businesses could be developed.

This recommendation will be investigated further.

Recommendation 5

Enforcement

TVP should be encouraged to tackle ASB as follows:

- a) WDC support and encourage TVP to achieve their full manning levels in Wycombe District - to match the proposed investment in Street Wardens (see items 6 & 7 below).
- b) WDC support and encourage TVP to improve responsiveness to the 101 emergency number.
- c) WDC explore options for supporting TVP to carry out successful recruitment to vacant posts including the possible provision of free parking.
- d) the feasibility of the Council having access to a TVP computer should be explored.

Cabinet Response

- a) Cabinet understands that TVP staffing levels dipped after the last restructuring saw a number of longer-serving and experienced officers leave. Cabinet is pleased that both the Marlow and Risborough rural areas are now fully staffed. However it is disappointing that police officers do not choose High Wycombe as a place to make their mark.

With regard to promoting the role of Special Constable to staff the Council has its Employer Supported Volunteering Policy which provides: -

“Up to one day (7.24 hours) paid time off per year for employee supported volunteering (pro rata for part time staff) will be allowed. Volunteering time can be taken as a single day or over a number of days (up to 7.24 hours for a full-time employee, or equivalent hours representing one day's work for staff working reduced hours). Requests for paid time off for voluntary work will be subject to manager approval and business needs”

- b) Cabinet is aware of the long wait times people are experiencing with the TVP 101 number and the Leader has already expressed concern about this to the Chief Constable and it has been raised at the Police and Crime Panel.
- c) The Council does not provide free car parking to its own staff, only to those that have a requirement to use their cars regularly for work. TVP staff are in a different position in that their work vehicles are supplied for them so they need a supply of low cost all day parking. Passes for town centre car parks can be purchased by Thames Valley Police on behalf of staff and until May 2019, when the service is due for review, the Handy Cross Park and Ride can be used free of charge.
- d) Access to the TVP system could only be via public wifi, which is insufficiently secure. The ASB Officer has access to all police stations as well as access to the TVP system. He also regularly works over in High Wycombe police station.

This recommendation has been partially supported.

Recommendation 6

WDC should consider employing Street Wardens to enforce PSPOs, who would be directed by WDC officers, but would work closely with the Police. The location and number of street wardens to be determined according to need and best practice.

Cabinet Response

Cabinet does not accept that it should step in and fund street wardens BECAUSE there are insufficient police officers. TVP are better funded than WDC to police the District and their issue is not one of funding but difficulty in recruiting officers to work in one town within the District. The Council's role is to reduce ASB and improve the environment for visitors and residents, not to take on the role or work of the Police.

Having noted that, Cabinet supports this recommendation in principle but is mindful that, while there is positive evidence of their effectiveness, there are also some places where street wardens have not been the solution. Cabinet therefore agrees to implement a one year pilot for High Wycombe town centre, as this is the area where most incidents are reported, and will include funding to employ three FTEs within the 2019/20 budget. Cabinet agrees that it is vital that street wardens work effectively with TVP and the HWBidCo to swiftly identify and tackle town centre ASB.

This recommendation is partially supported and will be the subject of a more detailed proposal to Cabinet.

Recommendation 7

The appointment of Street Wardens be accompanied by a stricter enforcement of Fixed Penalty Notices (FPNs) to demonstrate that the Council will not tolerate ASB.

Cabinet Response

Cabinet wants our town centres to be welcoming, safe and attractive. There is a balance to be struck between using fines to deter anti-social behaviour and issuing large numbers of fines for other matters such as licensing, taxi licensing, waste management, littering, illegal street traders, parks by-laws, idling motor vehicles etc. that may deter regular users of our towns. While Cabinet notes that, in theory, it could issue a large enough volume of FPNs to cover the cost of street wardens, as the TFG suggests, it is mindful that issuing such a volume of FPNs may cause an adverse public reaction. Therefore Cabinet prefers to fully fund a pilot rather than set targets for issuing numbers of FPNs to fund the pilot.

Cabinet commits to using FPNs in a responsible manner to tackle those issues that are of most concern to our residents and visitors.

This recommendation is partially supported.

Recommendation 8

FPNs continue to be issued even if only PCs and the Council's own ASB officer are authorised to issue them.

Cabinet Response

This recommendation is already supported. The Desborough PSPO has been in place, with minor revision, since it was agreed. The town centre PSPO has been revised, consultation has been completed and the revised PSPO is in place. This has not prevented WDC and TVP from issuing FPNs.

Recommendation 9

WDC put more resources into the understanding of these links (between begging, mental health and substance misuse), and actively support those agencies working to alleviate the problems.

Cabinet response

Relevant Portfolio Holders and officers within Housing, Community Services and Environmental Services are aware of the complex, multiple issues relating to vulnerable people within our town centres. The TFG encourages Cabinet to explore whether services designed to support people with addiction problems are coping, and if not why not. The TFG may not be aware that Bucks County Council is responsible for the commissioning of such treatment services locally.

The recommendation is not supported as this is not a service WDC has responsibility for. The TFG's observations will be shared with the County Council.

Recommendation 10

Communications

The Council has a co-ordinated campaign, with partners, in relation to street begging involving posters, banners, press, social media and radio to cover the whole of the District, the purpose of which would be not only to educate the public as to what the Council is doing, but also to try to remove the source of funding in the hope that it may persuade beggars to seek help from agencies and deter begging.

Cabinet Response

Cabinet has supported the HWBidCo's Sensible Change scheme to divert funding from beggars to charities and others that are in a position to provide the support people need to turn their lives around. Cabinet is keen to work with the new BidCo Manager to reinvigorate this campaign and the Communications Team is already working with Community Safety officers to publicise this area of work.

The recommendation is supported.

Background Papers

Improvement & Review Commission papers – 12 September 2018

Cabinet papers – 17 September 2018

Held in Democratic Services