

## **CLEANER GREENER AND SAFER COMMUNITIES OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

Monday, 30th July, 2012

**Present:-** Councillor Mrs Gillian Williams – in the Chair  
Councillors Allport, Mrs Burgess, Mrs Johnson, Miss Mancey,  
Miss Reddish, Robinson, Mrs Simpson, Stringer and Sweeney

### **1. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

There were no declarations of interest.

### **2. APOLOGIES**

Apologies were received from Councillor Tagg and Councillor Wemyss.

### **3. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING**

**RESOLVED:** That the minutes of the meeting held on 7 June 2012 be agreed as a correct record.

### **4. THE POTENTIAL MOVE OF THE LOCAL POLICING TEAM IN KIDSGROVE AND POLICING OF KIDSGROVE AND THE RURAL AREA IN THE FUTURE**

The Committee received a presentation from the Local Policing Team Commander for Newcastle Borough regarding the move of the local policing team in Kidsgrove into Kidsgrove Town Hall.

Refurbishment work was to commence at Kidsgrove Town Hall in early September with the move of the Police into the town hall anticipated to take place from mid to late October. The Police could understand why communities were concerned about police stations seemingly shutting down and wanted to reassure the Kidsgrove ward councillors that they were committed to being in Kidsgrove and that they wanted to be at the heart of the community. There would be no reduction in hours as a result of the move. The Police only utilised a small element of Kidsgrove Police Station and since 2005 all prisoners had been taken to Etruria. The definition of a police station had changed; historically there had been a need for a police station with cells to detain prisoners, it was now necessary to be located in a front-facing environment within the community. The town hall would be a much better environment being bright, airy and modern.

There would be savings from the Police moving into Kidsgrove Town Hall, these would not be hugely dramatic but saved losing officers. If more money was spent on buildings there would be less money for officers. The aim was for officers to be out and about on the streets, police officers could respond to incidents when out in the community, not from sitting in a station.

The move of the Police into Kidsgrove Town Hall was about effectively working together with partners; just being in the same building did not mean that partners were working together. There were other partners at Kidsgrove Town Hall: the Town Council, the Citizen's Advice Bureau and Families First (Staffordshire County

Council). Vulnerability was a growth area, with many partners coming into contact with the same vulnerable people. There had been initiatives in the locality such as partners collaborating to visit the vulnerable elderly population in order to discuss bogus officials with them, which had worked well. It could almost be seen as a template of how the Police would like to work with partners, with all partners looking beyond their own specific discipline. It was felt that Locality Action Partnerships were the key to working together. The Police felt that partners were at the early stage of a journey. We should be working together as one public sector and if we as public bodies struggled to navigate services how could the general public be expected to.

It was considered by Members that the closing of the current police station had not been dealt with in the best way and had been hidden away. There had been unsuccessful attempts to obtain information about the move and Members questioned how people would be kept informed now. The Police recognised that there was a need for engagement. Engagement was needed both internally with Police staff and externally within the whole Borough. The Police were open to suggestions and ideas for improving engagement. Members stated that Kidsgrove residents wanted to be kept informed of such things as integrated offender management. The Police could see two issues here: firstly that residents should be kept informed and secondly that once the move was complete the shutters should not come down and information not be communicated. The LPT Commander assured the Committee that this would not be allowed to happen.

During the presentation it was stated that crime figures in Kidsgrove were down year on year. In response to this Members highlighted that a problem that had been brought up at resident's meetings with regard to the elderly not using the new non-emergency 101 number to report crime, as they did not know it existed. Another problem was that 101 was being called, but Kidsgrove residents were being put through to Cheshire as they abutted the Cheshire border. Members felt that more crime in Kidsgrove would be reported if the 101 number worked correctly. The LPT Commander would look into the problems with the 101 number.

Members questioned whether the problems that had been encountered when the Police moved into Biddulph Town Hall had been considered. The arrangement at Biddulph was not working; the Police had not been happy since moving in to the town hall and were looking for alternative premises. There were no issues foreseen for Kidsgrove Town Hall and Biddulph Town Hall was not considered the model to follow. The LPT Commander had confidence that Kidsgrove Town Hall would work for the Police.

Members questioned that if there was no loss of man-power would the powers of PCSOs increase and would PCSOs take over the functions of officers leaving the Police Force due to cuts. There had been a recent review of PCSO powers and their role would not change and cuts could affect the PCSOs too. They were the most visible presence in the community and there was very little negative feedback with regard to them. Members agreed that PCSOs did a good job.

Members questioned that if there was a disturbance in Kidsgrove in twelve months time, would there be any difference in the way the issue would be dealt with compared to at the present time. It was confirmed that there would be no difference. Furthermore, Members questioned how a stolen car would be reported at the town hall. It was confirmed that members of the public could speak to the front of house police officers in green uniforms.

A lot of residents were against the move into the town hall. In particular there was a fear that it would not be private enough and that residents could feel intimidated. Members questioned whether the savings made from moving to the town hall would mean an increase in officers. It would not result in more officers but would minimise the loss of officers. There would be a private interview room for the Police. On the other hand, Members considered that the public may feel more comfortable going into the town hall to see the Police because it was not a Police station. The Commander confirmed that foot fall in the current station was low and it was hoped that by being in the town hall the Police would be able to pick up on issues with the increased footfall.

Members felt that response times had been affected as a result of the move of the response teams from Kidsgrove to Newcastle and responses to incidents were taking longer. There was a request by Members for copies of the minutes from all meetings between Newcastle Borough Council and Staffordshire Police regarding the potential use of Victoria Hall between 2010 and 2012. Officers confirmed they would look into this request.

Members questioned the nature of the lease to move into the Town Hall. They questioned whether there was a breakout clause and if the Police had a commitment to Kidsgrove as there was concern that the Police station could move again with the next tranche of cuts. There was a breakout clause, which was standard. There was a current commitment to Kidsgrove but there could not be commitment for the future. Members felt that the move was a good thing and that it should be accepted that it was going ahead but there was a need to give a commitment to the people of Kidsgrove. It was felt that there should be a positive attitude to the move. Members were for working together and asked how Councillors could help officers.

The Portfolio Holder for Safer Communities considered that there were benefits from joined up working. There was a long list of benefits for the move and a long list of non-change. There was a community perception of closure rather than of relocating. There were also closures in Newcastle and public anxiety needed to be managed. Local residents needed to be convinced that the move was not closure but transfer. It would be beneficial to think of it as a transfer and to continue the police presence with clear signage. It was felt that there were benefits from having a building with Police cars outside; it reassured the public. The Police were moving into the Civic Offices and there had been discussions about the Police having car parking spaces at the front of the building to show a visible police presence. The Commander stated that there had been discussions with regard to signage to ensure that the public knew where the Police were.

It was questioned whether there were plans to secure the old Police station once it was empty to prevent anti-social behaviour. If so, what would the cost be of securing the building. The Commander could not confirm there were plans but agreed that it would be embarrassing to have anti-social behaviour at an empty police station. It was thought that pre-emptive measures would be taken and then monitored and adjusted as necessary.

Members requested assurances that Police officers would be available to be seen in the town hall. Hopefully Police officers would be on the streets but the current provision would remain and officers would be available at the town hall from 9.00am-5.00pm Monday to Fridays.

The Chair asked if the Commander would be willing to attend a future meeting of the Committee after the move had taken place to update the Committee. This invitation was accepted.

**RESOLVED:** (a) That the information be received.

(b) That copies of the minutes from all meetings between Newcastle Borough Council and Staffordshire Police regarding the potential use of Victoria Hall between 2010 and 2012 be provided to Members.

(c) That the Local Policing Team Commander attends a future meeting of the Committee to update Members, after the move of the Police into Kidsgrove Town Hall has taken place.

5. **ANY OTHER BUSINESS**

There was no urgent business considered.

**COUNCILLOR MRS GILLIAN WILLIAMS**  
**Chair**