

## **THE MOVE OF FENTON MAGISTRATES COURTS TO NEWCASTLE MAGISTRATES COURTS**

**Submitted by:** Scrutiny Officer – Louise Stevenson

**Portfolio:** Safer Communities/Regeneration, Planning and Town Centres Development

**Ward(s) affected:** Town Centre

### **Purpose of the Report**

To inform the Cleaner, Greener and Safer Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee of the progress to date of the Officer and partner working group who have monitored the move of the Magistrates Courts from Fenton to Newcastle.

### **Recommendations**

**(a) That the Cleaner, Greener and Safer Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee receive the report and make comment as appropriate.**

**(b) That the Cleaner, Greener and Safer Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee agree to receive a further update from the working group when they have reviewed the move in six months time.**

### **Reasons**

To update the Cleaner, Greener and Safer Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee of the positive aspects of the magistrate court move and the partnership working that has taken place to monitor the move and communicate information to town centre businesses.

## **1. Background**

1.1 At the meeting of the Cleaner, Greener and Safer Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 5 September 2012, the move of Fenton Magistrates Court to Newcastle Magistrates Court was considered by the Committee alongside invited partners. HM Courts and Tribunals Service were unable to attend the meeting but sent a written response to questions. Concerns were raised at the meeting regarding the move of the courts and it was resolved that an officer and partner working group be set up to monitor the court move.

1.2 The following formed the officer and partner working group:

- Councillor Mrs G. Williams – Chair of Cleaner, Greener and Safer Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee and Ward Councillor for Cross Heath;
- Councillor Sweeney – Vice-Chair of Cleaner, Greener and Safer Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee;
- Councillor M Taylor – Councillor for the Town Ward;
- Councillor Miss Reddish – Chair of the Town, Thistleberry and Poolfields LAP;
- Mark Bailey – Head of Business Improvement and Partnerships;
- Kim Graham – Principal Regeneration Officer;
- Trevor Smith – Community Safety Officer;
- Andrew Williams – Head of Operational Support, Midlands Regional Support Unit, HM Courts and Tribunals Service.
- Inspector Mark Barlow – Newcastle Local Policing Team

- Doug Morris – Chairman, Newcastle-under-Lyme Partnership Against Business Crime (effective from the second meeting of the working group).
- 1.3 The first meeting of the working group took place on 17 October 2012, which saw Cllr Williams appointed as Chair and the remit, objectives and timescales for the working group being set (Appendix A). It was agreed that an invitation should be extended to Doug Morris to attend the next meeting.
- 1.4 The second meeting took place on 28 November 2012 with the agenda focusing on the remit points of communication with businesses (Business Crime Initiative and the Town Centre Partnership), the economic benefits of the move of the Magistrates Courts and the crime and disorder aspect/policing.
- 1.5 It was agreed at the meeting that a newsletter (Appendix B) should be distributed to town centre businesses to inform them of the move of the courts on 10 December 2012. Partners worked together after the meeting to ensure the newsletter was distributed as soon as possible. All the partners forming the working group contributed to the newsletter, which was compiled and printed by the Head of Business Improvements and Partnerships and his team. The newsletter was distributed to businesses by anti social behaviour Police Officers, which gave them the opportunity to engage with businesses in the process. The information in the newsletter was also sent to the Town Centre Partnership and the Town Centre Locality Actions Partnership. Information provided in the communication included:
- The renaming of Newcastle Magistrates Courts to the North Staffordshire Justice Centre, with a date for re-opening of 10 December 2012 after a £4.5 million refurbishment.
  - The introduction of a dispersal zone under Section 30 of the Anti-Social Behaviour Act 2003, which covers Newcastle Town Centre and the outlying streets. Under the legislation police officers have additional powers to take action against anyone acting or likely to act in an anti-social manner by directing them out of the designated areas. Those who fail to leave or return can be arrested and charged with offences under the act.
  - Operation Boycott commenced 1 October 2012, with extra officers from Newcastle Local Policing Team patrolling the town centre, targeting those people who were involved in or intent on causing anti-social behaviour.
  - The Newcastle Partnership structure and information about Locality Actions Partnerships (LAPs).
- 1.6 The working group gave consideration to the remit point of the positive aspects of the court move at the meeting. There would be approximately sixty members of staff at the court, plus 9 probation staff, the youth offending team, increased custody staff, the Magistrates themselves and the solicitors representing. In total there would be over one hundred staff compared to the eight staff that were previously on site, with additional staff being housed on previously empty floors. The working group considered this as a positive development in terms of bringing people into the town and potentially helping local businesses as a result and agreed that this welcome information should be included in the newsletter. It was also confirmed that there is no canteen in the courts, only tea points with vending machines, which was again considered potentially positive for town centre businesses. Crime and disorder and policing issues were also considered, including the planned increase in anti-social behaviour patrols as communicated in the leaflet would focus on high visibility of the Police and enforcing standards.
- 1.7 There was discussion of the former Sainsburys car park, as it was thought that people visiting the courts would make use of it. The only issue was the length of stay on the car

park, with a maximum stay of 4 hours which the courts wanted to see increased. This would be discussed with the Council's Engineering Manager. It was confirmed after the meeting on 17 January 2013 that the maximum stay on the former Sainsbury's car park had been extended, with a £6 ticket for all day parking available to use and a notice had been placed in the local press.

- 1.8 CCTV provision was discussed, with Doug Morris informing the working group of a volunteer project that had been highly successful and had led to a second project. The volunteers had been selected and were to attend a training session with the project to begin on Mondays two weeks after the officer and partner working group meeting. A third project would look to extend CCTV provision to an extra day at some point, however funding was the issue and would need to be addressed. CCTV provision was considered a necessity and there might be a requirement for more administration help. There were no plans to have CCTV outside of the courts, which it was felt might need to be looked at if it became problematic.

## 2. **Issues**

- 2.1 The last meeting of the working group took place on 17 January 2013. Progress against the remit points considered at the previous meeting was discussed and the working group as a whole felt that the move was going well. The positive message they had wished to convey to businesses had been, and town centre businesses were now aware of who they would need to contact if they encountered any problems. From the Police's perspective the move had been positive with no increases in anti social behaviour as at the time of the meeting. There was no evidence of drinking at the Courts, and any incidents had been dealt with by PCSOs or Police Officers. Operation Boycott figures were being reviewed but there were no issues of major concern.
- 2.2 There had been no rise in anti social behaviour from the Borough Council's perspective. Trevor Smith along with Natalie Snell (Community Safety Officers for NBC) and Trading Standards had paid educational visits to off licences.
- 2.3 The Town Centre Partnership (TCP) was looking to revive the Town Centre Herald, and this was on the agenda for the TCP's next meeting. If it was felt necessary to have a second communication to provide reassurance about the move, this could be incorporated into the Town Centre Herald. The Police could work with the TCP if there was any information or feedback to be communicated. If the working group wished to circulate any further information, then Police Officers on patrol could circulate as they had done with the working group newsletter. Thanks were extended to the Police for distributing the newsletter.
- 2.4 It was questioned whether there had been any feedback from businesses regarding better trade. Doug Morris advised that this was being considered and was something the Town Centre Manager had taken on. The move was being allowed to bed in and in a few weeks they would try and ascertain if there had been an increase in trade for town centre businesses.
- 2.5 The working group resolved at the meeting on 17 January 2013 to meet as required if issues arose. If they were not called upon to meet before, they would reconvene in six months to review how the move of the courts had progressed. If the feedback was still positive and it was considered appropriate, the working group could then conclude its meetings. Anti-social behaviour spike information would be available, which would be important to consider in distinguishing what was normal and expected anti-social behaviour and what was not.

## 3. **Outcomes Linked to Sustainable Community Strategy and Corporate Priorities**

- 3.1 Creating a cleaner, safer and sustainable Borough.

3.2 Creating a Borough of opportunity.

3.3 Becoming a Co-operative Council delivering high quality, community driven services.

4. **Legal and Statutory Implications**

4.1 Scrutiny may under The Local Government Act 2000 scrutinise issues of importance to the Council and its communities and make recommendations to the Council's Executive and under other legislation to other bodies.

5. **Financial and Resource Implications**

5.1 There are no financial and resource implications from this report, aside from Officer time taken to attend the meetings, compile the newsletter and the resources to print the newsletter.

13. **Earlier Cabinet/Committee Resolutions**

Cleaner, Greener and Safer Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee, 5 September 2012 – minute no.4.

14. **List of Appendices**

Appendix A – The remit and objectives of the working group  
Appendix B – The newsletter distributed to local businesses