



Fighting crime - locally



LGA LIBERAL DEMOCRATS

**Autumn
2012**



Photos on front page and page 6 : Third Avenue

Contents

1. Introduction <i>Cllr Duwayne Brooks, Lead Member, Safer Communities Board, LGA Lib Dem Group</i>	Page 5
2. 10 Ways to Tackle Crime - Locally	Page 6
3. Cutting Crime in Stockport <i>Cllr Mark Weldon, Stockport Metropolitan Borough Council</i>	Page 8
4. Islington Labour threatens Lib Dem record of action on crime <i>Cllr Terry Stacy, London Borough of Islington</i>	Page 10
5. Police Commissioners? Don't panic! <i>Cllr Richard Kemp, Liverpool City Council</i>	Page 15
6. What's life like with a directly elected Police and Crime Commissioner? <i>Caroline Pidgeon, Leader of the Liberal Democrat Group on the London Assembly</i>	Page 17
7. Newcastle - a proud Lib Dem record of action <i>Cllr Anita Lower, Newcastle City Council</i>	Page 19
8. The Somerset Story - Restorative Justice <i>Cllr Jill Shortland, Chair of the LGA Liberal Democrat Group</i>	Page 23
9. Community Justice - how it works in Sheffield <i>Cllr Shaffaq Mohammed, Sheffield City Council</i>	Page 27

10. Working Together to help Vulnerable People <i>Cllr Lisa Brett, Bath and North East Somerset</i>	Page 29
11. Making a Difference in Portsmouth <i>Cllr Lynne Stagg, Portsmouth City Council</i>	Page 32
12. Police and Crime Panels - Holding the Police Commissioners to Account <i>Cllr Duwayne Brooks, London Borough of Lewisham</i>	Page 35



Introduction

***Cllr Duwayne Brooks, London Borough of Lewisham
and LGA Lib Dem Lead member,
Safer Communities Board***

With the elections of Police and Crime Commissioners in November, I felt it was timely to remind people of the contribution local councils and councillors can make to fighting crime and creating safer communities.

Having led for the Liberal Democrats on the LGA Safer Communities Board, I felt it was important that the views of our councillors were heard very loudly. After all, it's local Lib Dem Councillors who will know their ward and community far better than any elected Police and Crime Commissioner will ever do.

We know, as Lib Dems, that the 'tough' option is working hard to prevent crime happening in the first place, and when it does to look at different ways that can support more traditional approaches to justice.

We sometimes hear from our opponents that the Lib Dems are not tough enough on crime. But we have shown at all levels of government and parts of the country that in fact the opposite is true.

As well as speaking for the LGA Lib Dem Group on Police and Crime Panels, we lead on tackling Anti Social Behaviour, Restorative Justice and Community Panels. Labour and Conservatives like to think that the way to fight crime is to sound 'tough' - then sit back and do nothing. We are taking action.

Be it working with the community to find local solutions to fighting crime such as Acceptable Behaviour Contracts and Community Justice Panels or working with other groups such as businesses, the NHS or Housing Associations, this booklet is full of good ideas to make our communities safer places to live.

My thanks to everyone who contributed to this booklet. And if you have other good examples from your area - let us know about it at libdem@lga.gov.uk

Duwayne Brooks
September 2012



10 Ways to Tackle Crime - *Locally*

The Lib Dem record of action on fighting crime would take more than one booklet to list! Other examples of action to fight crime include...

1. Bristol – Under the Lib Dems, crime levels have gone down due to effective local co-ordination between police, the council and other agencies. New priorities for Police Community Support Officers were drawn up to make them even more responsive to the needs of communities. Burglaries are down by 20% against a year ago, with 148 fewer victims. Violent crime is down by 14.6%, with 426 fewer victims. The numbers going into custody have also significantly reduced over the last 3 years.

2. Liverpool – A widespread scheme to install alleygates across the city, run by the then Lib Dem Council, cut domestic burglaries by up to 37%. Also see the article in this booklet to show how ward councillors can make a difference in fighting crime and anti-social behaviour, no matter who is the elected Police and Crime Commissioner!

3. Cardiff - Under the Lib Dems, Cardiff Council worked with the police and the local NHS to help tackle anti-social behaviour generated by excessive drinking. They used anonymised data from local Accident and Emergency departments to map violent incidents. They then used ‘saturation zones’ in certain streets to limit the numbers of alcohol licences permitted. A four year study saw 42% fewer woundings compared to 14 similar cities in England and Wales.

4. Oldham – Under the Lib Dems, a “minimum pricing” scheme was established to crack down on drink related Anti-Social Behaviour – the subject of a BBC Panorama documentary. Oldham couldn’t force a higher price on establishments so reviewed the licences of each of the 22 bars and clubs that sell cut-price drinks. They were told that if they want to sell alcohol at less than 75p a unit - about £1.88 for a strong pint of lager - they will have to change the way they operate. Customers were only allowed to buy just two drinks at a time and outlets could be made to provide extra door staff as well as paying for police officers to watch over the bar.

5. Sutton – Lib Dem Sutton set up the Safer Sutton Partnership in 2004. Brings all local public services covering community safety (council, police, schools, mental health, volunteers) together under a single line manager. Over the last 7 years this has meant reported crime has fallen by 27.5%, violence against the person down by 37%, motor vehicle theft down by 48%.

6. Kingston – working with the police and businesses via the Kingston First partnership, they signed a contract to manage the licensed taxi ranks to help young people get home safely. In the early hours of the morning, around 4,500 late night revellers are trying to get home so this needs some management! The Lib Dem council's work to support the Rose Theatre and planned later hours for shop opening means there is also a more diverse range of people attracted into the town centre at night.

7. Watford – Watford Community Housing Trust, working with the Lib Dem Council and police, launched the Positive Social Behaviour Award. The first recipients were three young people who saw an old woman collapse, retrieved her belongings, arranged for help and comforted her until an ambulance arrived. This is being adopted by other councils keen to celebrate the positive contributions made by young people.

8. Bedford – A 'Bobby Van' service provided over 600 vulnerable residents in Lib Dem Bedford with support during the 12 month period to the end of January 2012. 143 residents were elderly or vulnerable victims of crime from mainly burglary or attempted burglaries, 383 homes were fitted with added security measures to prevent the person becoming a victim. Victims of domestic abuse were also provided with personal and home security.

9. Northumberland – following the Scottish Government's decision to have a minimum unit price for alcohol, the Lib Dem led council are consulting with the public to hear their views to see if a similar proposal could work south of the border to tackle binge drinking and the anti-social behaviour associated with it. The opposition Labour Group have attracted widespread criticism for proposing lower alcohol prices to attract 'booze tourism'!

10. And don't forget Islington and Somerset's work to promote a liberal, community based approach to tackling anti social behaviour and prevent crime. Both Acceptable Behaviour Contracts and Community Justice Panels have been proved to work and have been put into use by other councils, as described later in this booklet.



Cutting Crime in Stockport

Cllr Mark Weldon, Executive Member for Supporting Communities, Stockport Metropolitan Borough Council

The Safer Stockport Partnership joins together many public and voluntary organisations, including Liberal Democrat run Stockport Council, Greater Manchester Police, the Health Service, Greater Manchester Probation Trust, Greater Manchester Fire and Rescue Service and Victim Support. Its purpose is to reduce crime, substance misuse and anti-social behaviour and the effect that has on the people of Stockport.

- The ‘Safer Stockport Partnership’ recently heard how Stockport’s successful crime policy has helped cut crime over the last eight years with over 900 fewer victims of crime.
- Last year anti-social behaviour was reduced by 21% which equates to 3,196 fewer incidents over the year.
- We share information across the agencies to successfully prevent crime and disorder in the borough.
- It’s very encouraging that crime has fallen for the eighth consecutive year thanks to the highly successful partnership work. However, we are not complacent and are determined to ensure that crime falls even further by building on the close working relationships with community groups and partner organisations.

We recently held a key conference, addressed by Cllr Sue Derbyshire, the Lib Dem Leader of Stockport Council and Chief Superintendent Chris Sykes of Greater Manchester Police.

Among those who received awards at this conference were a group of young women from Brinnington involved in the *Girls are Strong* project which looked at the impacts of domestic abuse and ways to promote positive relationships through activities and events organised through Stockport Without Abuse and Brinnington Education Achievement Partnership.

Stockport resident, Brenda Bates was presented with an award for her work through Poet’s Corner Action Group in North Reddish which meets on a monthly basis to provide a forum in which residents resolve neighbourhood issues together.

An example of Brenda’s innovative work is the development of football opportunities for some of the challenging young people in North Reddish, which is now delivered every Saturday on the estate by Reddish North End Football Club.

And we want to do more. For instance, we are now offering residents involved in Neighbourhood Watch schemes the opportunity to sign up to *Ringmaster*, a new crime prevention tool.

Ringmaster is a computerised communication system run by the SSP. The system offers residents, Neighbourhood Watch schemes, businesses and partner organisations crime reduction information and notification of crimes, incidents and events in their local area.

The service is free and everyone who signs up can receive messages by email, text or phone.

For more information about the SSP and the ‘Safer in Stockport’ initiative visit www.saferstockport.org.uk or call 0161 474 3143.



Islington Labour threatens Lib Dem record of action on crime

***Cllr. Terry Stacy,
London Borough of Islington***

Despite its image in the media as a wealthy borough of literati and luvvies living in row upon row of Georgian terraces (and, yes, there are pockets of those properties), it is often overlooked that Islington has some of the highest levels of poverty in the country.

Latest figures show that Islington is the 14th most deprived borough in England. We have many of the typical characteristics you would associate with inner London. The levels and types of crime reflect this. So how did Liberal Democrats in Islington go about tackling the issue that is often residents' biggest concern?

A liberal approach to crime and anti-social behaviour

Without a doubt, one of the most successful initiatives Islington Liberal Democrats took was the introduction of Acceptable Behaviour Contracts (ABCs).

The aim was to stop bad behaviour rather than punish offenders, invariably young people. They were used mainly around quality of life issues for local people such as threatening behaviour and harassment, racist behaviour, graffiti, criminal damage and sub-criminal behaviour.

ABCs are contracts between the council, police, perpetrator and their parent/guardian. They are not legally binding but can be used as part of an incremental approach leading to legal action in the form of possession orders or ASBOs if the bad behaviour continues. They are also an opportunity to provide positive solutions to issues such as family problems or bullying.

The young person is interviewed and their behaviour and its consequences are discussed. The perpetrator is offered help with changing their behaviour if they say they want it. They may also be given details of youth activities, counselling or mentoring to help divert them into positive behaviour. If a contract is breached the police and housing officers look at the circumstances and decide on the best course of action.

Residents, police and council staff have all reported a noticeable difference in the attitude and behaviour of young people in Islington. A Home Office report found ABCs to be successful and former New Labour Home Secretary, Jacqui Smith

announced that ABCs worked better than ASBOs. She ordered that they should be rolled out across the country.

ABCs have since been taken up by many other councils and are proving to be a more effective and liberal means of dealing with anti-social behaviour than some purely punitive approaches.

Acceptable Behaviour Contracts (ABCs) were also extended by Islington LibDems to become ABC+. With extra support packages on top of the ABCs we stop young people escalating to ASBOs.

ASBO+

Islington Liberal Democrats introduced the ASBO+ in 2005. This scheme means that every ASBO issued in Islington also comes with a support package to try to stop the behaviour that led to the ASBO. As a result, Islington's ASBO breach rate dropped to just 8% compared to nearly 50% nationally.

Commission on Young People

The tragic murders of two Islington teenagers in knife attacks spurred the council to set up a Commission to look into what the council could do to increase the safety of young people in the borough in 2007.

Islington Liberal Democrats realised that if we were going to find solutions that worked, we needed to listen to people on the front line. The list of witnesses included senior police officers, youth workers, teachers, parents and, most importantly, young people themselves. The involvement of young people reminded us that the majority are good citizens and most often the victims of crime. But they are also the ones who can tell us what to do and we need to listen to them.

The Commission had councillors and independent members, including a Police Superintendent, a representative from the Probation Service, the Roman Catholic Dean of Islington, and the Director of an educational organisation helping Afro-Caribbean boys. The commission was chaired by a Liberal Democrat councillor and legal aid lawyer.

The Commission produced a number of recommendations. These included working with the police to target knife crime hotspots, funding electronic hand-held portable knife detection equipment for the Safer Neighbourhood police teams, measures to reduce truancy, initiatives by the police to engage more with young people in schools/youth clubs and the expansion of Arsenal FC's 'Positive Futures' football scheme into local estates, parks and open spaces. The council adopted all the recommendations and agreed the funding to implement them in the Liberal Democrat budget motion.

Gang prevention strategy

Building on the work of the Youth Commission, Islington Liberal Democrats also launched one of London's first Gang Prevention Strategies. The aim was to co-ordinate existing responses to gang culture in the borough and to introduce new action to stop young people drifting into gangs and youth crime.

Islington's Gang Prevention Strategy tackles those youths identified by the police and council as most in danger of becoming criminals or victims of crime. Individual action plans are put in place to help them stay on the right side of the law and are monitored regularly. We were determined to stop gang culture and youth crime gaining a hold on our communities as it had in other London boroughs. We wanted the council to be proactive not reactive in tackling these issues. Again, the council budget included specific funding for this initiative.

Restorative justice

In conjunction with the Police, Islington Liberal Democrats also launched a new Restorative Justice programme in the borough to tackle crime and antisocial behaviour. This is a longstanding Liberal Democrat policy for dealing with crime.

Police dispense 'instant restorative justice' on the streets when vandals are caught in the act and are made to fix things up or clean graffiti. 'Restorative conferencing' brings offenders and victims face to face with a trained facilitator.

Did it work?

Yes! Since 2004 the total crime rate in Islington fell by over a third until Liberal Democrats lost control of the council in May 2010.

But these schemes alone were not a magic pill to solve the borough's crime and anti-social behaviour issues. Like many other councils, we also invested in professional witnesses, new CCTV schemes, youth services and improved security/designing out crime in our housing stock. We also funded up to 40 police officers over the course of the administration and invested a lot of time and energy setting up a joint Community Safety Department between the borough police and council. We also used ASBOs, dispersal zones and no-alcohol zones in parks/open spaces where appropriate.

Tough on crime?

Like many colleagues across the country, we lost control of the council to Labour in May 2010. Islington Labour promised in their manifesto to be 'tough on crime' aping Tony Blair's famous soundbite. So how does their record stand up so far?

One of the first decisions Labour made when they took control was to axe the Liberal Democrat funding for 16 PCSOs across the borough. They also abolished the two targeted policing teams we set up with the loss of a further 16 police officers. This year, Labour councillors presided over two major leaks of sensitive personal data on residents, potentially putting lives at risk. It has already cost the council £50,000 to put it right and the Information Commissioner may well fine the council for data protection breaches.

Labour councillors cannot bring themselves to vote for any Islington Liberal Democrat ideas on crime and community safety. They recently voted against an awareness campaign on mobile phone street robberies. They also refuse to consider Liberal Democrat proposals for more licensing ‘saturation zones’ in key alcohol hotspots around the borough. In the budget this year they also voted down our proposals for nine extra council-funded police officers. Ironically, the Labour council now employs more spin doctors than community safety staff after its budget cuts.

Given all of this, Islington Labour councillors then seemed surprised when serious crime levels began to rise dramatically. In the last twelve months:

- **Theft (street mugging) has spiralled by a massive 49%**
- **Serious youth violence (gangs) has leapt up by 29%**
- **Robberies have increased by 26%**
- **Residential burglary is up 17%**

In a sign of panic, Labour councillors realised they had to do something to address residents’ number one concern. So they spent £215,000 setting up yet another new telephone line for residents to report crime! They did also re-instate one of the police teams but this is a back-office function with not a single extra officer out on the borough’s streets.

Meanwhile of course they blame the Coalition government for everything and say they cannot do any more to tackle crime because they have no money. Yet for the last two years Islington Labour councillors have managed the incredible feat of not spending £8million net of the council budget! Tough on crime has proven to be as much as a soundbite in Labour Islington as it was for Tony Blair in government.

But the fundamentals of the Liberal Democrat community safety programme have not been tinkered with by Labour because they know that what we introduced works. Even ministers in the last Labour government praised Islington’s approach and adopted some of the measures nationally.

Conclusion

Liberal Democrats believe in helping people turn their lives around and breaking the cycle of crime before it is too late. Islington Liberal Democrats did not want to

demonise young people. We wanted to intervene in unacceptable behaviour that impacted on others while understanding that many people need help or support to overcome particular challenges.

It was this approach, we believe, that helped make crime and ASB fall in Islington. In each case we would work with residents, victims, perpetrators and the police to decide the most appropriate response - not just slap an ASBO on young people for the sake of it just to look 'tough'.

These are obviously much harder times now politically for Liberal Democrats and financially for all local authorities. Not all these ideas will be relevant now or affordable or appropriate in a non-urban area. But they give a flavour of how a Liberal Democrat approach to crime and anti-social behaviour puts residents at the heart of everything we do, seeks to protect those at risk in the community and tries to break the cycle of crime. We hope the ideas can be used around the country in your work and campaigning too.

If you want any more information about any of the crime and anti-social behaviour policies used by Islington Liberal Democrats, please contact Group Leader, Terry Stacy at: terry.stacy@islington.gov.uk



Police Commissioners? Don't panic!

***Cllr. Richard Kemp,
Liverpool City Council***

There's a lot of talk about the Police and Councils and communities because of the Police Commissioner elections. My guess is that it won't make a scrap of difference and that what we need to be doing now is what we should have been doing for years - work with and engage the Police in what you and the community are doing!

Things are very easy for us in Liverpool. Each ward has at least two PCSOs, a beat officer, a sergeant across a number of wards and an inspector over three wards. We know who they are and some of them have been around in our ward for some time.

We need to engage them day-to-day and in the longer-term as part of the partnership of activity that we create within our areas. A strong association with the police is, of course, very good politics. People like the police more than they like any politicians and working with them on key nuisance issues can often make an irresistible force.

A couple of stories can show what I mean:

- I was working in London and happened to have my council e-mail up and running. An e-mail came in about a minor nuisance from a constituent. I rang up the PCSO who is on my speed dial who happened to be 2 minutes away from the house. 17 minutes after e-mailing me a man in uniform came, spent 20 minutes with the constituent and they worked out what to do about the problem. The police helped us!
- Someone got stabbed in a rather nasty incident just outside my ward. The local inspector whose speed dial I am on rang to give me some details. It was a domestic incident which had no ramifications outside the house concerned. When the press rang me 10 minutes later I was able to calm things down and give them some information. I also rang the local church, residents' association chair and amenity group (all of whom are on speed dial) so that people knew what was going on. The result was a small rather than a large article in the paper about the stabbing and a calm community not pestering the police. We helped the police!

That's the reactive what about the proactive?

We have a ward fund and will often spend things either on the police or things that the Police support. We pay for the purchase and upkeep of a speed indicator advice but they move it around.

They do things or support events during the school holidays and we provide cash, kind or contacts to help them.

We have major problems with parking in parts of our ward some of which is for the police to sort out and some our parking attendants. We now use our scarce resources with the council and police working together in tandem. This applies to ticketing purges but also planning out what are the priorities for yellow lines or speeding restrictions or any other element of joint working around traffic issues.

Approximately half our case work relates to licensed premises either the licence, the planning or pavement cafés. We work with the police on new applications to try and judge what is reasonable to allow. When laws or conditions are broken we jointly work out what to do. In some cases the police will ask for a licensing review with our support and in some cases we will. They are much more able to collect evidence than we or the community can so their beat staff and PCSOs will watch over problem landlords and amass evidence which can often be used in council licensing, planning or traffic committees. We also approach a range of licensing issues together by joint approaches to landlords.

Anti-social behaviour is rarely easy to deal with and involves a multiplicity of agencies. When a problem is brought to our attention we convene a meeting of the relevant people which might include the police, youth service, parks' authorities, schools etc. Jointly within the ward we decide what can be done and immediately take action. Because we have helped build up a relationship such discussion can take place over the phone. Sometimes we don't even need to be involved but are added in to exchanges for information. BUT we helped create the conditions in which such exchanges could occur.

So the lesson is simple - if the police are not on your speed dial they should be. Do you know the police who cover your area? When did you last have an informal chat with them about issues? Are they confident about the relationship with you so that they tell you things in confidence?

We knew the relationship was right when we were told in advance of a raid on a cannabis factory. They wanted us to know that they were doing something in the middle of the night so that we could help provide community reassurance first thing in the morning. If we break that trust; if we misuse information; if we misuse the relationship then it would take years to get it back. But do things properly and the operational police in your area can be your greatest partners.

Police Commissioners – Chief Constables – who needs them when the crime and safety partnership in your ward works because you are at the heart of it!



What's life like with a directly elected Police and Crime Commissioner?

Caroline Pidgeon, Leader of the Liberal Democrat Group on the London Assembly

The passionate advocates of Police and Crime Commissioners often state that London has 'led the way'. Speaking from direct experience I have to say the reality is that there is very little to boast about so far!

It is true that the Mayor of London is now ultimately responsible for supervising the Metropolitan Police Service, with the Metropolitan Police Authority (MPA) replaced earlier this year by the Mayor's Office for Policing and Crime (MOPAC).

Uniquely in London the Office is headed by the Mayor or by whomever the Mayor nominates as the statutory Deputy Mayor for Policing and Crime. Boris Johnson opted for the latter option and appointed the former Conservative Leader of Hammersmith and Fulham Stephen Greenhalgh to the post following May's election. Previously the post was held by a London Assembly Member who at least had an electoral mandate!

Furthermore, the previous Deputy Mayor worked with all parties on the Assembly and the Commissioner of the Metropolitan Police, to develop protocols on how the new system would work and improve transparency around policing in the capital. Sadly Boris' new Deputy is out of his depth and has approached the role with three A's – aggression, arrogance and attitude – something that has rubbed all parties up the wrong way!

The London Assembly's Police and Crime Committee (PCC) examines the work of MOPAC. I am Deputy Chair of this committee and it has an additional remit to other such Committees elsewhere in the country. In addition to holding the Deputy Mayor to account for his actions we can investigate anything which we consider to be of importance to policing and crime reduction in Greater London and make recommendations for improvements.

So for example, at the moment we are carrying out an investigation into how victims of crime are treated in the capital, examining why the Met has the lowest victim satisfaction rating of any police force in England and Wales. We also hold a monthly Question and Answer hearing with the Deputy Mayor and the Commissioner of the Metropolis.

So what lessons can be learnt from this brave new policing model trialled in London?

Firstly, I would recommend viewing the YouTube video of the Deputy Mayor's first appearance before our Police and Crime Committee. To turn up not being briefed and to have told another guest – the Commissioner Bernard Hogan-Howe – not to attend our meeting is not the best tactic of working with your Police and Crime Panel. It showed utter contempt for democratic accountability.

But there are some simple lessons that can already be learnt.

Key is ensuring that past records and expertise are not lost. It might seem a small measure but it was really important that Baroness Dee Doocey, my former colleague on the Metropolitan Police Authority, obtained a firm guarantee that the old website of the Metropolitan Police Authority is permanently maintained. Numerous reports and detailed records and transcripts from past meetings are still available and will play a key role in supporting further scrutiny and ensuring corporate memory is not lost. Furthermore, this new structure will only work if there is respect all round from the Directly Elected Commissioner to the Chief Constable to the Police and Crime Panel. Protocols must be established which guarantee access to information and to police officers – both for private briefings and for public scrutiny.

In London, the battle lines have been drawn with the new Deputy Mayor insisting any requests for information from the Met go through him. He will assess if he thinks it is in line with our duties and decide if he will permit the Met Police to provide the said information. He is also furious that the Commissioner has agreed to attend our monthly Q&A meetings.

I would argue that members of the newly established Police and Crime Panels around the country must have a direct interface with senior police officers. They must also be able to put questions directly to senior police officers, with their answers being on record. Indeed to be denied such access or ability to question senior police officers, as well as the new Police and Crime Commissioner, would totally undermine the effectiveness of our scrutiny.

So to conclude, the situation in London is far from perfect. We still have a long way to go to ensure that we have real checks and balances in place and that the Metropolitan Police Service is ultimately accountable to Londoners. If you serve on a Police and Crime Panel in a few months time prepare to fight your corner!

Caroline is Leader of the Liberal Democrats on the London Assembly. She is Deputy Chair of the London Assembly's Police and Crime Committee and was a Member of the Metropolitan Police Authority from 2008 to 2012



Newcastle - a proud Lib Dem record of action

Cllr. Anita Lower, Newcastle City Council and Lib Dem member, LGA Safer Communities Board

Under the Liberal Democrats, we made sure that Newcastle City Council took tackling Anti Social Behaviour seriously, adopting a ‘Victim Approach To Anti-Social Behaviour’.

The background to adopting this approach was the Pilkington family, an infamous case which involved a woman tragically killing herself and her daughter, as a result of the family being subject to persistent incidents of hate crime and ASB.

This case highlighted a need to extend the Safe Newcastle Partnership response to ASB by ensuring:

- The victim is heard and their vulnerability is assessed
- Reported incidents are cross referenced and shared
- In cases of high & complex victim vulnerability, a multi-agency action plan focussing on the safety of the victim, as well as action to tackle the perpetrator, is agreed and carried out.

Newcastle City Council began the development of a multi-agency database designed to ensure that reported Anti-Social Behaviour was shared.

‘Your Homes Newcastle’, which manages the council’s housing stock, extended its Housing Anti-Social Behaviour & Enforcement Team service by:

- Offering Victim Support to victims of ASB in its tenancies and to victims in the private sector where the perpetrator was a tenant
- Introduced Minimum Standards including targets for response to complaint times
- Assessing victim vulnerability.

‘Safe Newcastle’ the Crime Reduction Partnership for the City was effectively chaired by the Liberal Democrats for seven years and during that time Safer Newcastle provided funds for a range of activity to support effective action to tackle Anti Social Behaviour (ASB). This included: the Student Community Safety Initiative, an ASB Environmental Health Officer, Selective Licensing areas, redeployable CCTV cameras, and legal support for ASB enforcement action.

The partnership recognised the need to ensure provision of similar service standards, comparable to those for ‘Your Homes Newcastle’ tenants, to residents who are owner occupiers or who live in the private rented sector.

The ‘Victim Approach to Anti Social Behaviour’ is a multi-agency commitment to deal with ASB no matter what the tenure of the property is.

Agencies such as the Police, Registered Social Landlords, Regulatory Services, Victim Support & Safe Newcastle work together to protect and support victims of ASB and these arrangements are supported by:

- The appointment of a Victim Support Worker for victims of ASB in the private sector. The worker spends half the week located within Regulatory Services and Public Protection Division taking referrals from the police, the specialist ASB Environmental Health Officer, the Noise Team etc.
- The appointment of a Voids Property Officers to manage and enforce actions around empty properties which become magnets for ASB.
- Training to help staff assess how best to help victims.
- The commissioning of mediation services and training to deal with disputes between neighbours at an early stage to try and deal with issues satisfactorily before they escalate.
- The agreement of partners to support fortnightly meetings to task and coordinate Action Plans for the cases of the most complex and vulnerable victims.
- The appointment of a Coordinator to ensure a timely exchange of information and to assist in developing the system.

Good practice case studies include:

1. Supporting the victim and getting results

Jane and her partner Phil suffered from noise nuisance, harassment and threats from their downstairs neighbours since they moved into their privately rented flat. The neighbours made threats, caused noise nuisance through loud music and shouting and act in an intimidating manner towards Jane and Phil. Jane is a survivor of domestic abuse from a previous relationship. Jane was pregnant and the stress and lack of sleep has impacted on her health.

Newcastle City Council notified the ASB Victim Worker that they were dealing with a vulnerable victim and support was put in place. The support was provided alongside enforcement action taken by Newcastle City Council. Colleagues from the Public Health, Housing Selective Licensing team and Noise Team worked together Work continued with the landlord and the offending tenant to try and address the tenant’s behaviour and in turn prevent any actions to end the tenancy. Unfortunately, this was unsuccessful. Interim Anti-Social Behaviour Orders were obtained against the tenant and her partner, and when this also failed to curb the behaviour the Selective Licensing team assisted the landlord to collate the evidence to enable possession of the property through the county court.

The ASB Victim Worker continued to visit the complainants and provided ongoing emotional support, as well as supporting them at court. The Interim Anti-Social Behaviour Orders were breached by both the tenant and her guest within a week of them being issued; this resulted in the guest being sent to jail for 12 weeks, and the tenant received hefty fines. The landlord also secured possession of the property, and the tenant was evicted.

Through a partnership approach this case action was taken swiftly, the victim was supported and her quality of life improved significantly.

2. Intervention to support young people

A young person, living with her mum, also lived with two sisters, both involved with low level anti social activity and her two brothers, also teenagers, who were both involved in the criminal justice system. The family rent a property from the council.

She was referred to the project by 'Your Homes Newcastle' Family Intervention Project; they were concerned with the amount of crime and anti social behaviour associated with the household. She appeared to be following in the footsteps of her siblings/peers, and the family was on the brink of being evicted from the property.

She became involved with a positive peer group, undertaking an award program, developing confidence and self esteem, and achievement. She participated in 1:1 sessions exploring consequences of actions, respect for herself, others, and peer pressure. Her involvement in a drama and video project exploring and dramatising issues current to young people (knife crime, peer pressure, bullying.)

She moved on to attend the established girls group, and explored issues including personal safety and boundaries, and developed her confidence sufficiently to support the other young females in the group and helped staff to deliver elements of the sessions and workshops to other young people. She is doing well at school, being successful in her school's 'dance best' auditions, she often calls into the project to catch up with staff and on occasions has helped out with small projects with other young people.

Support for mum

The project gave a range of support and interventions to the mother, including support with housing issues, positive parenting programs, developing strategies for boundary setting and dealing with negative behaviour within the family setting. 'Your Homes Newcastle' have lifted the eviction notice as mum has made progress in dealing with the disruption associated with the household, and she has enrolled on a further education course to enhance her chances of employment in the future.

Under the Lib Dems, Newcastle City Council also:

1. Cracked down on binge drinking
 - Newcastle were instrumental in introducing licensing for all door supervision staff, long before the national scheme was introduced.
 - We also used the 2004 Licensing Act to take the opportunity to introduce Special Policy Areas in 3 parts of the City, where the presumption was all applications for further licenses would be refused unless they offered something unique to the night-time economy.
 - This allowed the City to stop the growth in the number of High Volume Vertical Drinking Establishments and reduce pressure on the City Centre and Police.

2. Supported everybody living in student areas
 - The Liberal Democrat administration introduced a scheme called ‘Operation OAK’ operating in student areas.
 - The local councillors and the universities jointly funded extra policing to help prevent burglary, anti- social behaviour, and reduce community tensions.

3. Helped people get home safely at night
 - The council also joint funded with the Police ‘taxi marshalling’ at the city centre taxi ranks.
 - This involved a joint operation with police officers and enforcement teams operating a zero tolerance policy, as a result recording of low level crime rose but more serious crime decreased.

4. Helped deal with community tensions
 - We also introduced a rapid response approach to incidents, this was tested when there was a potential flashpoint incident when, tragically, a police car knocked down and killed a 16 year old girl.
 - By using the community links and contacts already established officers were able to respond quickly to community concerns and provide much needed information to diffuse the situation.



The Somerset Story - Restorative Justice ***Cllr. Jill Shortland,*** ***Chair of the LGA Liberal Democrat Group***

Community Restorative Practice began in Somerset in 2003 when I launched a campaign for Community Justice. I described the need as “moving back to the days when volunteers sat in Justice over their peers, now called Magistrates but lost is the local community element of the work that Magistrates used to be responsible for.”

This gave rise to very many letters to the papers and I spearheaded the first Community Justice System that brought local Justice Panels into place to deal with crime in communities. Volunteers were trained, a co-ordinator appointed and the Chard Community Justice Panel was launched and in February 2005 the panel sat for the first time and heard their first case.

Since then the panel has evolved and now is the Somerset Community Justice Panel (CJP) and a registered Charity.

When the first successes of the CJP became apparent there was some disquiet amongst members of the Judicial System who saw the role of the CJP as a threat to their domination of the norm. As a result of sustained persuasion, these organisations soon became aware that the CJP and the Restorative Justice (RJ) administered by them was not a threat but something that could enhance and bridge the gap between communities and the Judicial System.

Presentations to and discussions with Lord Chief Justices and The Senior Presiding Judge for England and Wales, Lord Goldring, have continued to promote the advantages of Restorative Justice, not only at the pre-court stage but also at the pre-sentence and post sentence stage.

These two latter stages may require a degree of legislation - so to help lobby for this, I have tabled amendments to this autumn’s Liberal Democrat Conference motion on Rehabilitation (2012).

There is a drive nationally to have Community Justice Panels or Neighbourhood Justice Panels across England and Wales. The South Somerset model is held as national best practice and is used in the Governments Green paper ‘Breaking the Cycle’.

The main users of the Community Justice Panels are the partner agencies and our communities themselves, as without their support and involvement it would not succeed. It is important that the Restorative Justice and Practices delivered by these Community Justice Panels is of a robust nature.

This is achieved by training delivered to the volunteers by 2 qualified trainers accredited by the International Institute of Restorative Practices (IIRP). Volunteers receive an intensive 3-day course followed by a 1 day advanced practice day where volunteers are also given training in procedures and child protection issues. The services of these trainers can also be utilised to supply training to outside organisations thus generating income for the panel.

According to recent research by the LGA the cost of different crimes and those typical of cases dealt with by CJP are as follows:

Common Assault	£648
Theft	£720
Criminal Damage	£612

The Somerset Community Justice Panel could deal with these types of cases at an average cost of just £163.50 per case.

Since the Community Justice Panels inception in 2005, it has grown from strength to strength, winning several awards including in 2010 the Queens Award for Voluntary Service.

It has been recognised as producing savings of up to 75% to our partner agencies.

Police and Housing Officers actively promote the use of Restorative Justice used by the Community Justice Panel and find that the savings in time and the outcomes enhance the communities understanding and satisfaction of the service they provide.

Victim satisfaction levels are extremely high, between 90 and 95%.

The Community Justice Panel process provides an opportunity to interact with the individual responsible for the harm leading to the Panel.

This interaction during the panel is described as being an important aspect of the process and one which victims see as being beneficial.

Significantly the opportunities afforded to interact with the offender and specifically, the opportunity provided by the Community Justice Panel to ask the offender questions is seen by victims as very beneficial.

Additionally, the opportunity for victims to receive some explanation regarding the offence or their misconceptions over being specifically targeted is identified as an important aspect of the process.

Reoffending rates continue to be low and are currently at 3%. The latest Ministry of Justice figures show some prisons have reoffending rates that top 70%

The Prison Reform Trust survey after the riots demonstrated that:-

1. An overwhelming majority of the public (94%) want people who have committed offences such as theft or vandalism to be required to do unpaid work in the community as part of their sentence to pay back for what they have done
2. Nearly nine out of 10 people (88%) agree that victims of theft and vandalism should be given the opportunity to inform offenders of the harm and distress they have caused
3. Almost three quarters (71%) believe victims should have a say in how the offender can best make amends for the harm they have caused
4. There was widespread support for 'making amends to victims' (79%); 'unpaid community work' (76%); and less than two-thirds (65%) consider that a prison sentence would be effective in preventing crime and disorder.

A large majority were in favour of victims having the opportunity to inform offenders of the distress and harm they have caused - a key element of the restorative justice approach. Nearly nine out of 10 people were in favour of the measure and just under two thirds strongly agreed.

There was considerable unanimity in support across gender, age and social status. Among age groups, agreement ranged within four percentage points, from 86% of 25-34 years olds to 90% of those aged 35-44. The range of difference in agreement with the proposal among social grades was one percentage point. Very few respondents disagreed that victims should have the opportunity to inform offenders of the harm done, with only 3% expressing strong disagreement.

This demonstrates that there should be public support for moving further into creating legislation to offer Community Justice Panels to inform the Courts pre-sentence and post-sentence depending on the severity of the offence.

In Canada where Community Justice was introduced to their Criminal Justice System in 1996 they have reduced custodial sentences dramatically. One could only envisage the huge cost saving to the public purse and reduction in reoffending in the process although the report that was issued 10 years on highlighted that this saving had not

been measured! Even some very difficult hate crime assault cases have resulted in better outcomes for both victims and communities and some would say better outcomes for the offender!

It is now almost 10 years since the concept was first introduced in Chard, in South Somerset. The actual delivery may be very slightly different from that which was envisaged but the opportunity to draw communities into the justice system was never greater. The Canadian experience is clear that involving local communities in every part of Justice is vital for reducing reoffending, supporting victims and restoring communities. Local government sits at the heart of our communities, and more councils would do well to follow the example of Somerset and as Lib Dems also did in Sheffield. I will keep campaigning for both councils and the Ministry of Justice to see the benefit in investing in Community Justice schemes.

Notes:

Community Justice Panel (CJP) in South Somerset brings together those harmed by acts of crime and anti-social behaviour and those who cause that harm. It utilises Restorative Justice and Practices in a scripted model to work with Victims and Offenders to repair the harm caused and give closure to all parties involved. In doing so it develops communities and compliments the work achieved by the partner agencies, i.e. police, councils and social housing providers. It is the intention of the CJP through the assistance of our partner agencies to have Restorative Justice and practices available and offered to all victims of crime and those harmed by crime and anti-social behaviour.

Community Justice - how it works in Sheffield

Cllr. Shaffaq Mohammed, Leader of the Opposition, Sheffield City Council

The Community Justice Team (CJT) has been in operation in Sheffield since May 2009 and was a Liberal Democrat initiative in the city led by Cllr Paul Scriven, then council leader, following the pioneering work carried out in Somerset. The team consists of a Community Justice Team Coordinator (paid employee of Sheffield City Council) and 40 Volunteer Facilitators. The volunteers are recruited, selected, trained and mentored by the Coordinator. The Coordinator and Facilitators use Restorative Justice to resolve disputes and repair harm. The service is victim focussed but involves liaising with both victims and wrong-doers, together with their supporters, to come to a satisfactory conclusion. In essence, the victim drives the process.

Referrals

Referrals are made to the CJT by South Yorkshire Police, Sheffield Homes and other Registered Social Landlords (RSLs). The Police refer 85% of the cases. All parties referred give consent to be referred to this service. Referrals are accepted for parties aged 10 years upwards, for persons who have had only low-level disposals previously, i.e. final warnings and reprimands for children and young people and cautions for adults.

There are two distinct types of referrals; criminal cases and neighbour disputes. The criminal cases consist of low-level anti-social behaviour, such as criminal damage, minor assault, theft and public order offences. In criminal cases there is usually a defined Wrongdoer and Harmed Person. The neighbour disputes are usually around issues concerning; noise, parking, littering and occasional boundary disputes. In the neighbour disputes, both parties usually have equally valid complaints against each other and are therefore all referred to as harmed persons.

Coordination

The coordinator endeavours to allocate cases to Facilitators who live in the same area as the



● Cllr Shaffaq Mohammed (bottom of photo) with volunteers who had signed up to be on the Community Justice Team

referred parties which helps to encourage local problem solving led by the Facilitators. Facilitators will make a home visit to each referred party in order to gain more information and an idea of those parties expectations of resolution.

When parties have been visited at home a Community Justice Panel is held at a local community building, usually a Library. All parties are asked a series of questions about the circumstances of the case with a view to coming to a satisfactory conclusion and agreement. Typical agreements consist of; apologies for behaviours; a reassurance that those behaviours will not be repeated; direct reparation (repairs or replacement of damaged property or goods); indirect reparation (services to the community such as litter-picking); and financial reparation for damaged or stolen property. All agreements are checked for compliance, the consequence for non-engagement or non-compliance is to return the case to the referrer.

Outcomes & Data

A recent evaluation by a Sheffield University International Criminology Student has found that 98.8% of those referred to The Community Justice Team were highly satisfied with the service they received.

There have been 450 referrals to CJT since 2009. 221 referrals in 2011.

To the beginning of 2012 there were
140 referred cases of criminal damage
100 referred cases for neighbour disputes
52 referred cases of assault
56 referred cases of theft
100 other miscellaneous cases (e.g. motorbike nuisance, section 5, trespass etc.)

Approximately half are for children and young people. The re-offending rate for children and young people is 8%. The average time taken to resolve cases is 6 weeks. I will leave the final words to Paul Scriven, who was right to say: *“The panels have been particularly effective in dealing with problems caused by young people, forcing them to face up to the consequences of their actions on others and hopefully changing their ways.*

“There is only an 8 per cent reoffending rate for young people who have been through the panels, which is well below the national average. This shows that putting fairness and justice at the heart of local communities in this way is really working, and I’m happy with the good results we’ve seen so far.”



Working together to help vulnerable people

Cllr. Lisa Brett, Bath and North East Somerset and Lib Dem member, LGA Safer Communities Board

Nationally, the police estimate that they get a call every minute from someone who is a victim of domestic abuse.

Local authorities have a key role to play in increasing awareness of domestic abuse and promoting early intervention.

Victims of domestic abuse often suffer in silence and frequently require considerable support to regain self-confidence and control of their lives. Local Authorities must be aware that domestic abuse can happen between people of all ages, cultures, sexual orientation, religion and classes. People who suffer this kind of crime often stay with the perpetrator for years for a wide range of reasons. Occasionally perpetrators have more than one partner, and move around staying in different homes, creating a number of victims from a single source of abuse.

The main priority of the local authority and police in responding to domestic abuse must be to protect the lives of both adults and children who are at risk. This requires that local authorities commission adequate support services and engaging with a wide range of agencies. Community Safety Partnerships are responsible for ensuring the co-ordination of services supporting people suffering this crime and promoting awareness. Local councillors are responsible for ensuring this happens through scrutiny panels, influence policy and where necessary, redesign their services for the longer term.

In Bath and North East Somerset, Southside Family Project employs independent domestic abuse advisors to help those at risk. This can be a lengthy process but, to me this goes to the heart of what being a Liberal Democrat is about - standing up to help those most at risk and working with others to achieve it.

Sexual violence

It's a myth that victims of sexual assault always look battered and bruised. A sexual assault may leave no outward signs, but it's still a devastating crime. Local authorities should be concerned about the under-reporting of sexual assault and ensure the promotion of awareness as well as adequate resourcing of support services. Councillors who are concerned about this type of crime should lobby hard for more

Sexual Assault Referral Centres. These are independent centres where victims of sexual assault can get medical care as well as practical and emotional support.

Hate Crime

Hate crime hurts us all as they strike at the heart of our communities. Hate crimes are motivated by hostility or prejudice against a person because of their; disability, gender-identity, race, religion or faith and sexual orientation. Getting the right response to tackling hate crime requires leadership from Ward Councillors to ensure targeted action.

Community safety partnerships should recognize that it is essential that front-line police understand the extent of hate crime in an area and respond to it. Local authorities can facilitate this by ensuring victims have access to third party reporting procedure.

In Bath & North East Somerset, the Partnership Against Hate Crime's Panel had identified a part of the City with particularly high levels of racism, antisocial behavior and general nuisance. An intensive partnership programme of work to address both the physical and behavioural concerns at this location saw a marked improvement of residents' perception of the area. Additional physical works, from CCTV and door entry systems, to better cleaning of the public areas, has been done in tandem with a range of activities to address negative behaviour, such as Acceptable Behaviour Contracts and community development activities.

The families who had suffered the greatest abuse report that there has been a significant reduction in problems and they no longer want to be re-housed. The extent of resident satisfaction is such that they engaged in suggesting ways of maintain the community spirit. For example, developing a local lettings policy and residents charter with their housing association.

Young People

Councillors can promote better and earlier intervention with young people at risk of becoming perpetrators of crime. The police alone cannot tackle youth crime effectively; children's services, parents, schools, local agencies, parents and communities must play their part.

In order to break the cycle of offending and transform the life chances of young people at risk of becoming perpetrators, local authorities must help combine family support and community empowerment with appropriate penalties and enforcement.

Councillors can promote wider use of family intervention and Troubled Families work, which provide non-negotiable family support and relevant lasting interventions. Both projects set clear boundaries of acceptable behaviour and failure to comply with the terms of this support has appropriately firm consequences.

The needs of young people both as victims and offenders can be complex and deep rooted. In Bath, local Lib Dem councillors raised concern about community tensions emerging in a particular part of town and approached the councils Community Safety Team for their intervention.

Working with the local community, investigations found that one young person, (who also had a multi-cultural background) was known by local agencies and schools as a catalyst in stirring up racism against Polish members of the community, as well as BME neighbours. Through the council's multi-agency Case Review Panel, she was also identified as a victim of racism. Her family was already subject to Family Intervention and she was subject of an Acceptable Behaviour Contract (ABC). In recognition of the complex nature of her behaviour the charity Support Against Racist Incidents' agreed to work with her as a victim whilst also setting out to rigorous actions to address her behavior as a perpetrator. Six months on, and the girl and family are progressing very well and the community are also part of this success. Schools and local people are helping each other, in a positive way.

Youth Re-offending

Many young offenders do not re-offend, some because they fear more serious consequences and find sufficient alternatives to crime, or they may simply out-grow such behaviour. However, a number of offenders require more support to ensure they do not re-offend. To help them Liberal Democrat councillors can campaign for the council to:

- improve education and training for young offenders by funding and commissioning education services
- reinforce the role of Children's Services in overseeing resettlement provision
- develop a more comprehensive package of support for young people leaving custody expand resettlement and aftercare provision
- examine why they offend - what are the root causes?
- use restorative justice approaches to enable young people at risk of offending to understand the impact of their behaviour - on victims, their families, communities/business and schools



Making a difference in Portsmouth

Cllr. Lynne Stagg, Portsmouth City Council

Lib Dem Portsmouth City Council decided some years ago that action to fight crime must be evidence-based and that all members of the Safer Portsmouth Partnership (officers, councillors and other organisations) must work closely together. Staff from outside agencies are co-located within the council offices alongside the Community Safety team. Rigorous scrutiny and research are carried out in order to be sure that the services provided are the right ones - including working with Portsmouth University.

Public sector cuts mean there is an even greater need to work more smartly so that, as far as possible services are maintained and this is a key Lib Dem priority. We've focused on specific problems to target in depth at any one time rather than trying to tackle everything at the same time and spreading diminishing resources thinly and therefore less effectively. This has proved to be very effective as crime in general has decreased and public satisfaction has increased

Two examples of what we are doing are preventing re-offending and tackling alcohol abuse

Cutting re-offending

- Currently action is focused on better partnership working to enable offenders to turn their lives around. This includes delivering interventions to address domestic abuse, reviewing the effectiveness of integrated offender management and supporting those released from prison.
- In 2011 a local 'meet at the gate' project was pump primed to make sure that the target group of ex-offenders have peer support, suitable accommodation and access to employment and training as soon as possible after release from prison in order to stop the re-offending cycle. The aim of the project is to improve existing services so that we work smarter within current – and reducing – resources. A city wide review of work to address re-offending is planned for 2013/14.

How will we know we have made a difference?

- We track re-offending measures and successful completions of specific interventions such as those offenders on a Drug Rehabilitation Requirement, on 'specified activities' such as those delivered by the Alcohol Interventions

Team (funded by public health budgets) and a Domestic Abuse Perpetrators programme.

- These are presented quarterly to the Safer Portsmouth Partnership and an annual review of reoffending is included. We also monitor levels of the type of crimes most often committed by prolific offenders (burglary, theft and vehicle crime) as a rough indicator of the success of our work with prolific offenders.

Alcohol abuse

Portsmouth has a vibrant night-time economy that benefits the city, bringing an influx of people from surrounding areas and boosting local jobs.

Most people drink alcohol sensibly, but a significant minority drink at levels that may harm their health. Alcohol misuse costs the city about £74 million per year through costs to health services, crime and criminal justice agencies and employers (25% of Alcohol Review Survey respondents lost at least one day of work due to drinking, 3.5% missed 10 days or more).

Although the city has less hazardous and harmful drinkers than the national and regional averages, the city has more ‘binge drinkers’ than the national average and this is something we are working hard to tackle. The crime (and violent crime) rate attributable to alcohol is higher in Portsmouth than national, regional or similar areas. Our residents also report that drunk and rowdy behaviour causes problems where they live.

What ‘works’ to reduce alcohol misuse?

- PREVENTION including awareness-raising and media campaigns together with education programmes that work to challenge behaviour and attitudes to alcohol.
- TREATMENT focused on increasing access to treatment and support services from early intervention through to structured community and residential services for tier 3 / 4 referrals.
- ENFORCEMENT tackling alcohol related crime and ASB and enforcing licensing legislation appropriately.

Where are the gaps? And what are we doing about it?

- The Safer Portsmouth Partnership run awareness and education campaigns and a range of treatment and support services in the city. Last year 757 people were in treatment for alcohol misuse and 1415 people were referred to the Alcohol Intervention Team.

- An Alcohol Specialist Nurse Service works with those who misuse alcohol to the extent that they have severe health problems requiring numerous ambulance call outs, Accident and Emergency visits and hospital admissions each year.
- The patients requiring most resources were identified and targeted with the aim of reducing hospital admissions. A 39% reduction was achieved in 2011/12, which resulted in a reduction of 94 A&E visits, 97 hospital admissions and 53 ambulance call outs, a saving of over £55,000. An Alcohol Advisory School Nurse works with young people who have alcohol problems.
- Enforcement actions take place as well as provision of a 'Safe Space' in the city centre on Friday and Saturday nights to provide minor injuries treatment and advice. The partnerships works with licensed retailers and premises to encourage responsible selling of alcohol and take action including closures against licensed premises acting irresponsibly.

The Safer Portsmouth Partnership aim to go further, increasing the number of people - particularly young people and parents - receiving alcohol education; increase capacity to support victims of domestic abuse; reduce the availability of alcohol to young people; reverse the growth in hospital-related admissions and continue to target the night time economy through a combination of enforcement and promotion of responsible retailing to help reduce crime in those areas.



Police and Crime Panels - holding the Police Commissioners to account

Cllr. Duwayne Brooks, London Borough of Lewisham

Since the Police Reform and Social Responsibility Act became law in September 2011, one of the LGA's priorities has been to help with the establishment of police and crime panels in England. They can be made up of between 10 and 18 councillors as well as two independent members.

The Act creates police and crime panels to hold police and crime commissioners to account, and gives them certain powers to do this:

- They can compel the police and crime commissioner and any member of their staff to attend meetings of the panel
- They can request papers from the PCC who has to supply them except where they are operationally sensitive
- On a two-thirds majority the panel has the ability to veto the police and crime commissioner's precept and choice for chief constable.

The legislation also makes local authorities in England responsible for setting up panels. However, the Home Secretary was left with the power to set up a panel where the councils in a force area are unable to do so. The LGA therefore put a programme of support in place to help councils in England. This focus on just English panels was a result of a disagreement between the Welsh Assembly government and Whitehall, which left the Home Office with direct responsibility for setting up the four panels in Wales.

LGA members and officers have run a series of events on Police and Crime Panels, and you can download a range of guidance and information on both panels and commissioners from the LGA at www.local.gov.uk/pcc.

As councils started work on setting up police and crime panels, the LGA created an online network on its Knowledge Hub (<https://knowledgehub.local.gov.uk/> or go to www.local.gov.uk) to swap information and good practice. This support will continue as the Police and Crime Panels get to work. Councillors can also call the Police and Crime Panel advice line on 020 7664 3241.

The network now has over 160 members drawn from councils directly involved in setting up and supporting panels, and has provided a good means of sharing and resolving issues.

A key issue, especially for Lib Dems, has been the need under the balanced appointment objective in the Act for the membership of the panel to reflect the political make-up of the relevant authorities in the force area when taken together.

The Act itself was vague on how the balanced appointment objective should be met, so the Home Office produced guidance on how it thought the political composition of the panel should be worked out, which can be found in the Home Office's Police and Crime Commissioner bulletin No. 6: <http://tinyurl.com/92j5zme>.

The LGA produced its own guidance on how councils could go about achieving a balanced panel within the restrictions of the legislation, such as looking at co-opting additional councillors on to the panel to make it politically balanced.

But ultimately, the LGA can only advise and not force the councils in a police area to make their panels fully proportionate! Councils decide how they interpret the legislation, and the law only says the balanced appointment objective has to be achieved 'so far as is practicable'.

While some councils listened to the advice, and expanded the panels to allow proportionality, we know of one police area where at the moment this has not led to any Liberal Democrat representation and the LGA Lib Dem Group continues to work with local Lib Dem councillors in that area to try and find a solution. As the Lib Dem lead on this issue I will do my best to ensure Lib Dem representation on all panels.

With the main elements for setting up panels already in place it is no surprise that in many areas the panels have had their first meetings. At these meetings panels are looking ahead to what they will need to do once police and crime commissioners are elected.

A number of important tasks face panels in the first few months:

- New regulations from the Home Office mean that commissioners have until the end of January to put their precept proposals to the panel, which then has just a week to decide whether to veto the precept.
- Panels will also have to consider and make recommendations on the police and crime plans that commissioners need to have published by the end of March 2013.
- There is a strong likelihood given the number of chief constables who could retire, and the number of police and crime commissioners talking of appointing a deputy, that some panels will also be busy conducting confirmation hearings during December and into early 2013.

Panels provide the main means for councillors and councils to hold the police and crime commissioner to account, but all Lib Dem Councillors can still use the scrutiny processes, questions and motions at council meetings to which allow them to raise issues with their panel members.

Of course more traditional Lib Dem campaigning methods on the doorstep and in the media can also be used to make the Police and Crime Commissioner take action to address failings in the police. I know how important it is to keep holding those running the police service to account, so no matter whether you are a councillor or an activist, keep campaigning on crime and asking the right questions!

Don't forget!

Finally, don't forget that the Association of Liberal Democrat Councillors (ALDC) has produced a series of leaflets and artwork on Police and Crime Commissioners that local Liberal Democrat councillors and campaigners may find useful in the next couple of months. Log in at www.aldc.org for more details.



www.libdemgroup.local.gov.uk

Published September 2012 by the Local Government Association Liberal Democrat Group, 6th Floor, Local Government House, Smith Square, London, SW1P 3HZ