



**To/
Adam Hill, Deputy Chief Executive
Swansea Council & Trudi Meyrick,
Chief Superintendent South Wales
Police
Joint Chairs of Safer Swansea
Community Safety Partnership
BY EMAIL**

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SPC/2021-22/14
08 April 2022

cc: Cllrs. Andrea Lewis & Alyson Pugh

Summary: This is a letter from the Scrutiny Programme Committee to the Joint Chairs of the Safer Swansea Community Safety Partnership following the meeting of the Committee on 15 February 2022. It is about the performance of the Safer Swansea Partnership. A formal written response is not required however issues raised and recommendations made will be followed up by the Committee.

Dear Adam / Trudi,

Scrutiny Programme Committee – 15 February

We are writing to you following our Crime & Disorder Scrutiny session, looking at the performance of the Safer Swansea Community Safety Partnership, with our views, reflecting on information presented, questions, and discussion. This follows on from our previous session on this in May 2021.

We thank you for attending the meeting and appreciated the input, including detailed presentation, provided by Paul Thomas, the Council's Community Integration Partnership Manager and Superintendent Mark Brier, in helping us to understand the partnership working and activities, progress / achievements against priorities and objectives, challenges over the past year, and focus for the future. You also provided the Committee with relevant performance and crime statistics. The meeting also benefited from the attendance of the Leader of the Council, Cllr. Rob Stewart, and Cabinet Member, Cllr. Alyson Pugh, who is also a Safer Swansea Partnership Representative, and the Council's Chief Executive, Phil Roberts. It was a very engaging and constructive scrutiny session.

OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY / TROSOLWG A CHRAFFU
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Through questioning we were able to explore a number of issues including the following:

Safer Swansea Partnership (SSP) priorities

We asked about the relationship between Safer Swansea Partnership (SSP) priorities, individual Police priorities and Council priorities, and other strategic objectives, including the Public Services Board, and how this work has synergy and complements each other.

The Committee heard about key priorities within the Police & Crime Commissioner's Crime Reduction Plan and Chief Constable's Delivery Plan. We also heard about the role of the Serious Organised Crime Board within the overall SSP Governance Structure - a discrete regional partnership group to problem solve issues on organised crime which sits alongside the SSP, gathering and sharing intelligence, e.g., issues such as exploitation and County Lines.

We also heard about the vital role played by non-statutory and Third Sector organisations in delivering SSP priorities, e.g., the work led by Swansea Women's Aid and Barod helping with approaches to addressing issues relating to High Street.

We also asked about developments in relation to the renewal of the Safer Swansea Partnership Strategy, as the current 3-year strategy was for 2018-2021.

The continued impact of the pandemic, and effect on crime and disorder and SSP activities

We heard that well-established partnership working arrangements have strengthened over the past two years and helped to maintain a good response to the pandemic and deal with the challenges. The development of meetings on-line has improved contact and interaction between partners and enabled more frequent dialogue to tackle problems.

It was clear that the pandemic has disrupted everyone's work, and impacted every person, and there was acknowledgement of the 'hidden harms' (e.g., exploitation, abuse, violence) and community tensions that have surfaced exacerbated by social media. We were interested in what the SSP was having to do differently, and what the local experience was in terms of crime and disorder exacerbated by the pandemic, e.g., anti-social behaviour, violence against women / domestic abuse.

There was also some discussion about the extent to which have we seen breaches of Covid rules over the past year and take up of resources in their enforcement. We heard that Welsh Government funding had enabled us to set up Joint Enforcement Teams so existing resources did not have to be

diverted, and these have worked effectively in challenging circumstances, though 'business as usual' in terms of the work of Environmental / Public Health teams has been impacted upon significantly, to divert attention to Covid enforcement. We noted a deliberate shift towards 'education' in signposting advice and support, in ensuring public compliance with the rules (which have changed frequently over the last two years), than simply focussing on enforcement and punishment. We heard your praise for the majority of local people and business who have been supportive of the various restrictions and compliance with the rules.

The Partnership's response to the Mayhill riot in May 2021 and implications for the SSP of findings of the Independent Learning Review on Events at Mayhill and Waun Wen

We asked about progress on the recommendations, which include reference to improvements necessary to partnership arrangements, multi-agency working, and community engagement. We noted that an Extraordinary Safer Swansea Partnership meeting was to be held at the end of February to look at the recommendations made in the inquiry and agree actions. We noted this meeting will also involve the Police & Crime Commissioner.

We heard about the work carried out and support in the immediate aftermath to address the situation and positive steps taken to engage the communities, though Committee members raised some concern regarding disparity in support and visibility within the two different areas, following the riot, probably hindered the fact that geographical boundaries meant different officials being involved. There was a remark that some communities are still feeling left behind and abandoned, and the disparity needed to be addressed. We stressed the need to involve the communities to identify the right solutions and improvements.

We also noted that there would be an internal review of the riot within the Police and re-structure to address the issues raised and ensure operational learning from the experience, to prevent this happening anywhere else in Swansea. The Committee felt it important that the full forensic investigation, as called for by the Independent Learning Review, should be open and transparent and we look forward to its findings. There was also some discussion on current police resources / staffing levels, given concerns about the Police response to the incident and how it was dealt with. It was clarified that the issue was not about the sufficiency of resources but about how well those resources were deployed on the night in question, acknowledging there were procedural failures, that the Police will learn from, as the disorder developed and escalated very quickly.

At the time of our meeting, we noted that following Police investigations a large number of individuals have now been charged with various offences relating to the unprecedented incident.

How the recent findings of the Child Sexual Exploitation IICSA Report were being addressed

The report looked at Swansea, amongst other cities, and the Committee were concerned to read that little was known about organised networks / gang related exploitation operating in the area. We were aware that this matter was being discussed in detail within the Child & Family Services Scrutiny Performance Panel in March however were keen to get some assurance around improvement. We heard that work is ongoing around addressing the 'intelligence gap' in terms of profiling and data completeness, and improved multi-agency working including closer joined up working between the Police and Social Services around safeguarding and exploitation. It was stressed to us that improvements have already been made which postdate the period looked at by the report, and we were reassured that robust arrangements are in place, including the establishment of a Multi-Agency Child Missing Exploitation Trafficking Panel, which is looking at issues around Child Sexual Exploitation.

The extent and nature of Hate Crime in Swansea

We asked whether 456 hate crimes reported in Swansea during 2021 was a comparatively low or high figure, and what positive action the SSP has taken in relation to community cohesion / hate crime, including addressing the reluctance of some vulnerable individuals to report such crimes because of their experiences with public authority, and increasing public trust.

We were assured that Swansea was not an outlier in terms of the level of hate crime reported, though this remained a key area of focus, including partnership work on improving community cohesion and integration through education, training, work with schools, and public / social media messaging about diversity to challenge hateful abuse and prejudices, and break down barriers. We were particularly interested in the experience of Swansea's refugee and asylum seek population but were told that there was no prevalence of hate crime in the area based on status. Most of the hate crime related to race and religion. We learned of the extra efforts made when families arrive in Swansea with neighbourhood policing in place, and support from Third Sector organisations. There is also multi-agency support to help victims. There was also some discussion on Swansea's commitment to becoming a 'Human Rights City', supported by all Public Services Bord partners.

It is important not to lose sight of the fact that there may be an under-reporting of hate crime and its concealment within communities, and we need to give people the confidence to report it which requires careful contact and engagement.

Violence against Women / Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence

The Committee was concerned about how well we were addressing violence against women / domestic abuse and sexual violence, and heard about work on this, as one of the five main SSP Priorities. We heard about successful Home Office grant bids in respect of domestic violence and investment into female safety in the night-time economy, including training for door staff. You also talked about the creation of 'safe spaces' with 20+ businesses and some fire stations coming on board to offer and support this, and holistic support to victims, including the development of remote site for victims to give evidence securely. You told us that significant numbers within the Council's workforce have received training on domestic violence.

Figures from 2019/20, obtained via a Freedom of Information request, would indicate a worryingly low rate of complaints that are received by the Police in relation to sexual offences, particularly rape, leading to charges being brought against alleged offenders. Overall, it was just under 11%, but for alleged instances of rape this was 7.33% across South Wales which is particularly concerning. It is doubtful to us that over 92% of complaints would be completely unfounded. We asked about steps / different approaches begin taken to improve upon this, as part of the strategic approach to address this. We heard there were many challenges faced by the Police in dealing with such cases and one of the reasons for the low figures included the fact that a high percentage of individuals subsequently disengage, and offenders may have been convicted for other offences that were more likely to result in prosecution. We noted that South Wales Police is one of seven pilot forces that are changing the way we look to investigate rape, and heard that work is in progress to improve things including greater focus on perpetrators and perpetrator behaviour, with support to the victim to get the best outcome which may not necessarily be an outcome through the courts, better connectivity with the CPS on the scrutiny of complaints with regular meetings, and a dedicated Rape Investigation Team is being set up as it is a complex crime to investigate, very resource-intensive, and requires joined-up working with others.

Levels of knife crime and anti-social behaviour

Your figures showed that in 2021, there were 612 knife-related occurrences reported in Swansea (342 crimes and 270 incidents). We were appalled by the recent serious stabbing incident in Gorseinon and were concerned whether we were seeing a rise in knife-crime in the area and wanted to know what was being done to prevent this sort of incident. We were told that there was actually a downward trend in knife crime in Swansea and it should be considered to be an isolated incident, however incidents such as that in Gorseinon can affect public perception of knife crime in the area and fear, and the Partnership recognised the need to keep on top of this. We noted that the perpetrators were quickly arrested.

We asked about measures to tackle not only knife crime, but more generally, activities to prevent / deal with anti-social behaviour within communities (e.g., issues with off-road bikers / quad bikes around Swansea), and what has been achieved, particularly in the case of youth anti-social behaviour. You talked about campaigns targeting 11 to 16 year-olds, work in schools, focus on early intervention, and progress with the use of Public Space Protection Orders. The Committee heard about the challenges in dealing with the public's fear of crime and perceptions about safety, and the SSP's response to alleviate that, e.g., specific work on the night-time economy and improving safety.

Scrutiny Views

From our discussion, the Committee would highlight the following issues in terms of providing 'critical-friend' challenge to the Safer Swansea Partnership in dealing with crime and disorder.

Safer Swansea Partnership Strategy

We noted the intention to extend the current Safer Swansea Partnership Strategy for 6 months whilst developing a new Strategy, as we head out of the pandemic and into recovery. We were interested in the timeline / process regarding the new Strategy and any revision to the current five strategic priorities, which the SSP is focussing its work on. It was noted that the Swansea Public Services Board's new Well-being Assessment, which is being finalised, along with other information will help inform the SSP Strategy and the setting of priorities going forward. This will need to include how we address the issues coming out of the pandemic that are impacting on community safety. We would request the SSP to report the draft Strategy to the Committee when it is available so that it can provide comment, and we would be happy also to see wider councillor consultation.

Relationships and communication between the Police and local Councillors

This was something also raised in the last Crime & Disorder Scrutiny session. From the recent discussion, there seemed to be an inconsistent picture across Swansea, with regular meetings working well in some areas but room for improvement in others. We asked you to ensure that there are forward planned regular and structured arrangements in place across all areas, clear points of contact, and feedback to councillors on issues. You undertook to look at this and ensure there is effective engagement between councillors and local policing inspectors, building relationships.

Approaches to improving public information, awareness, and engagement

We called for a more joined up approach to social media across SSP partners to ensure work on community safety is effectively communicated and reaches a large audience. The Committee felt it was important to clearly show to the public what SSP activity looks like, focusing on the positive work, and asked the SSP to reflect on what it currently does and consider how it can utilise social media and other methods of public communication better, and enable the sharing of information and community intelligence gathering that is meaningful. We noted that the SSP will be discussing a Public Participation Strategy shortly which will be consulted upon.

Your Response

We hope that you find the contents of this letter useful and would welcome any comments, however we do not expect you to provide a formal response. However, we do expect our views to be considered by the Partnership and the Committee will follow up on progress in addressing these issues.

Our next Crime & Disorder Scrutiny session will take place in the new municipal year, arrangements for which will be communicated in due course. Currently the Committee looks at the performance of the Safer Swansea Partnership on an annual basis, however, will review this as we develop the scrutiny work programme for 2022/23 and beyond to ensure arrangements are effective.

Yours sincerely,



COUNCILLOR PETER BLACK

Chair, Scrutiny Programme Committee

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