

Select Committee on Community Safety and Community Services

8th January 2009

Report of the Director of adult & Community Housing Services

Crime and disorder on the North Priory Estate

Purpose of Report

1. To respond to members' concerns on the crime and disorder risks on the North Priory Estate.

Background

2. In November 2006 the Council Cabinet approved authorisation to formally commence the regeneration of the North Priory Estate.
3. At the time there was concern from the Residents' Steering Group and the Regeneration Project Board that vandalism and acts of anti-social behaviour might increase in number and escalate in scale on the estate.
4. In an effort to ensure that this did not occur a number of new measures were put in place and measures were stepped up.
5. Those included high level representation on a range of groups from the West Midlands Fire Service and the West Midlands Police. Working in concert with the Local Authority was extremely helpful in a range of proactive and speedy reactive measures to deal with the potential for an accelerating rate of anti-social behaviour.
6. It is fair to say that at these initial stages both the West Midlands Fire Service and the West Midlands Police Service were extremely concerned that this estate was already regarded as one of the top 10 hotspots for anti-social behaviour in the whole of the West Midlands and the regeneration proposals may see an upsurge of criminality and anti-social behaviour.
7. North Priory had long been a problematic area for both services. Indeed it is fair to say that both services saw the decision to regenerate North Priory as potentially undermining one of the key target indicators for the whole of the local Dudley assessment matrix that would have a wider impact than just North Priory.
8. However it must be emphasised that North Priory as a 'hotspot' of activity predates the decision to regenerate the estate. Research undertaken for a presentation to the '2008 Institute of Housing National Conference' indicated that in 1951 North Priory had the 'highest incidence per head of population of juvenile delinquency' in the West Midlands.

9. Other measures introduced and stepped up included a litter pick day organised in conjunction with the Fire Service and Police Service alongside more regular inspections and walkabouts on the estate.
10. Following this intensity of co-ordinated partnership activity by April of 2007 the Police were able to report a reduction in crime across the estate and the increasing numbers of empty properties were not seeing increased levels of vandalism.
11. Whilst the Fire Service had noted a number of incidents over Easter 2007 these were less than anticipated for a regular holiday period.
12. Despite a quieter than anticipated Easter, April as a whole did see an overall increase in concern over vandalism and anti-social behaviour and to this end the North Priory Project Board considered a range of proactive and reactive measure to be taken to combat this upsurge.
13. By June 2007 there was welcome news that the level of vandalism and criminality had dropped but dumping of rubbish continued to be a problem and this was targeted throughout the summer months of 2007.
14. By mid summer residents on the Steering Group were seeing a response to the strong action taken by the Council and acknowledged 'an improvement in the appearance of the estate'.
15. In July 2007 despite the reduction in fly-tipping and lower levels of anti-social behaviour there was concern about the marginal increase in attempted and actual burglaries on the estate. In response a joint meeting on the 20th of July was called with the Police and the Fire Service by the Local Authority to deal with the increase.
16. In response to this upsurge additional Police resources funded by the Local Authority were drafted in and this had a very positive impact with arrests and prosecutions being made and actioned.
17. The involvement of the local estate assistant was stepped up with proactive action been taken on shrubs and hedges to both improve visibility but ensure that combustible material was removed quickly from the estate.
18. A range of diversionary activities were promoted throughout the summer and early autumn and the Halloween evening was extensively supported.
19. As the estate moved into the winter of 2007 the additional Police presence was continued and November saw an upsurge in the number of arrests.
20. Throughout the winter of 2007 as well as the additional Police patrols were continued and an action campaign was targeted on graffiti on the estate.
21. By the spring of 2008 Bromford Housing had been chosen as the prospective partner and was beginning to input into the proactive work on the estate. As part of a national trend, this unfortunately coincided with an upsurge in metal thefts on the estate which prompted as it had elsewhere call for increased Police patrols.
22. Perhaps inevitably with less and less households living on the estate then this period also saw an upsurge in attempted break-ins to empty properties alongside a

number of arson attacks on skips.

23. Towards the end of last summer the increase in arson attacks had tailed off following further concerted action with the West Midlands Fire Service. Despite their original concerns at the outset of the regeneration programme both the Police and the Fire Service were now extremely complimentary about the way the project was being managed. Indeed both requested to take photos of the area as a way of sharing good practice with other local authorities.
24. The strong message to the tenants complemented by action from the Police and Fire Service ensured that all skips were kept locked at all times and hence this had a dramatic reduction on the number of skip fires.
25. Throughout last autumn there were a number of burglaries at four properties of which three were void. A couple of incidents of fire occurred but much less than the level of the summer.
26. The upsurge in fire activity toward the end of November involved conifer trees and over fifty were removed very swiftly to ensure that this form of targeted arson did not increase. In response to these fires additional Police patrols were also funded to combat these concerning incidents.
27. The last Project Board before Christmas had reported a couple of fires on the estate but not targeted at the remaining trees and a co-ordinated campaign with the Police was resurrected to deal with an upsurge of metal thefts.

Finance

28. The cost of the estate patrols have been funded within the base budget for the estates regeneration. It should be noted that the budget line for security has under-spent by £100,000.

Law

29. Section 2 of the Local Government Act 2000, empowers the Council to take action to implement measures it considers likely to achieve the promotion or improvement of the economic, social or environmental well-being of the Borough.
30. Section 111 of the Local Government Act, 1972, enables the Council to do anything which is calculated to facilitate or is conducive or incidental to the discharge of its statutory functions.
31. There is a duty under Section 17 of the Crime and Disorder Act 1998 to account for the implications of the impact on community safety of actions and decisions relating to service areas.

Equality Impact

32. It is intended that the regeneration of the North Priory estate will create a mixed, sustainable community providing a wider range of housing tenure and property types than currently provided. This will help to meet both a wider range of housing need and aspirations.

Recommendation

33. It is recommended that the Committee notes the report.



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