

Minutes



Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee

Date: 8 January 2018

Time: 10.00 am

Present: Councillors J Guy (Chair), M Al-Nuaimi, C Evans, M Evans, C Ferris, P Hourahine, J Hughes, L Lacey and M Spencer

In Attendance: Neil Barnett (Democratic Services Support Officer); Daniel Cooke (Overview and Scrutiny Officer); Helen Wilkie (Public Protection Manager); Inspector John Davies.

Apologies: None

1 **Declarations of Interest**

None

2 **City Centre PSPO (Public Spaces Protection Order)**

City Centre PSPO –

Invitees;

- Helen Wilkie – Public Protection Manager
- Inspector John Davies – Gwent Police

The Public Protection Manager introduced herself and Inspector John Davies to the Committee. The Officer provided an overview of the current Public Spaces Protection Order (PSPO) which was enacted on November 2015. It was advised that the Order will expire in November 2018 and would be considered timely to review it now with a view to enacting a revised City Centre PSPO, taking into account what has worked over the past two years, what restrictions need to be kept or revised, and whether new restrictions need to be introduced to tackle other forms of anti-social behaviour that are occurring in the city centre. Public consultation would take place in form of an online survey and information would be gathered ready for April's meeting for the Committee to make recommendations to Council regarding the revised PSPO.

Each restriction was then discussed:

Street drinking

It was advised that street drinking is still prevalent, and is the main restriction breached. Two camps of drinkers were mentioned, those who move around dependant on weather, and pub and club goers 'pre loading' who bring beer with them before going into clubs. It was explained that the Licensing Committee have tried to combat this by declining requests from off-licences to extend the time they can sell alcohol. It was then recommended that this restriction stays in the Order.

Touting for services / donations

The Public Protection Manager was pleased to inform the Committee that there has been a decrease from previous years in the amount of charity agents along Commercial Street, although complaints are still being received about Internet Services, Phone Sellers and Claim Handlers. The Inspector advised that even though the Police are not getting a lot of complaints relating to this, it is still happening. The Committee were advised that it would be possible to keep this restriction but amend the definition, as traders are not covered in the Street Trading legislation.

Aggressive Begging

It was advised that there is still a problem with aggressive begging, and the Committee were directed to the report which states that the Community Safety Wardens deal with a high number of complaints, as do the Police. The Police Inspector advised that a number of Fixed Penalty Notices had been issued, and the Police have also issued Community Protection warnings. The Inspector advised that the Police feel that this area is still vastly underreported to them, even though the complaints that are being received are high.

The Inspector then advised that over the last 18 months aggressive begging has gotten worse, especially around cash points, and explained that most cash points in the night time have a beggar near which people find intimidating. The Committee were informed that due to the definition of "aggressive", the Police need to secure witness statements to prove that the beggar had been aggressive for action to have been taken. The Police have been working with the Rough Sleepers Group and the Council's Homelessness department to help and assist those most vulnerable, but noted that not everyone wishes to engage, which then causes problems.

The Committee was advised that an alternation could be considered in the Order for begging, either a blanket ban of begging in the city centre, or an alternative which is currently favoured in other parts of the UK is to prohibit begging within the vicinity of cash machines, a 10 metre distance example was then given. The Committee was advised that the Business Improvement District are looking to introduce a Diverted Giving Scheme, which had been discussed could be launched later this month, to encourage the public not to give to beggars, but instead to donate through approved retailers in the city centre, where funds will be transferred to the Wallich who work with and help the rough sleepers in the city centre.

Flyposting

The Committee were informed that there have been no problems with flyposting as it is covered by legislation other than the City Centre PSPO. The Committee were advised to recommend this restriction is removed from the Order.

Dogs on leads

The Committee were informed that there had been a number of complaints about dogs walking loose in the City Centre, but the whole of Newport is covered by dog fouling legislation. The Committee were advised to recommend this restriction is removed from the Order.

A proposal was made to the Committee to keep Street Drinking in the Order, look to change the definition of the begging restriction and aggressive touting services. A new restriction was then suggested to the Committee, Gang Anti-Social Behaviour. The Police state that 29% of the calls they receive in the city centre relate to gang/youth anti-social behaviour occurring from 3pm and peaking at about 8pm daily. Youths loitering near fast food outlets/ bus stations are the subject of many complaints from members of the public and business owners, who are either confronted by gangs or feel intimidated by their presence when

walking past them. It was suggested that we replicate the restriction that is part of the recently enacted Pillgwenlly PSPO, namely;
“No person shall congregate in a group of 3 or more persons within the Restricted Area AFTER an authorised person has requested that the group disperse”,
or instead, a variant that is in use elsewhere. Exeter Council’s PSPO’s restriction was included in the Officers report and referred to.

The Committee then discussed the following:

The Committee commented on the survey which was included in the report, whilst praising the information given they felt that it was slightly long, and a 5 minute online survey should be enough. Members also enquired about the lack of information of the success rates of other authority’s schemes. The Public Protection Manager advised that she would get in contact with her counterparts in other authorities to get this information for the Members. The Inspector also advised he would do this with his Police counterparts in the same areas. Members praised the presentation and discussed including legal highs in the Order. It was also mentioned that cycling in the city centre was not included in the report, which is covered by the Road Traffic Act but is dangerous in pedestrian areas. Members were advised that cycling was not in the original Order as it was covered by traffic legislation, and was felt that there are current laws to control it, which the Police can currently enforce. The Inspector advised that something that could be looked into is an increase in Officers in the city centre and have restriction included in the Order. It was also advised that in regards to legal highs, it will be included in the public consultation to see if they have noticed this and if they’d like to have it included in the revised Order.

Members commented on people working within the city centre and their concerns of feeling less secure in the area from 7am – 9am. It was asked whether there would be an increase of officers or community officers in the city centre to give assurance. The Police explained to the Members that traditionally during these times there are a change of shifts, and officers are dealing with prisoners caught from the previous night so police visibility is quite poor during these times, although three new officers had started today.

Members spoke of previously attending a visit to the city centre with the Police to view derelict buildings and a query was made if there were links between rough sleepers and arson to derelict buildings, as the buildings they visited had been stripped of their metals to sell for scrap. The Inspector advised the Committee that though rough sleepers have been known to stay in derelict buildings but wanted to make clear that the Police cannot and will not make a link. The Inspector advised the Committee that prior to Christmas a couple of Members came along with the Police on a night out to see the issues that they are facing, and advised Members were invited to come in pairs or groups to also take witness if they wanted to in the future.

It was asked by Members if the more successful restrictions in the Order, dogs on leads and flyposting, would be able to stay on the Order. If they are taken off it may signify to people that you can do these again. It was also asked if the online consultation questionnaire could include views of people who use the city centre on a regular basis i.e Admiral staff. The Public Protection Manager advised that The Welsh Government had stated if a restriction is no longer facing any problems they should be removed from the Order. It was also advised that the Business Improvement District would advertise on social media and deliver flyers to retailers in the City Centre, as well as Newport Centre, Information Station and any other public building to encourage filling out the online questionnaire.

The Inspector then advised the Committee that success of the Order is the people fearing being dealt with in court. They will try to get views of his Police counterparts in other areas to bring back to the Committee.

It was advised that moving beggars to other areas is not the answer, as some Councils have banned beggars around cashpoints who then congregate around car parks. Suggestion was made that the Committee look at schemes taking place in other authorities that have had a positive effect. The Inspector advised that there is a holistic approach dealing with those who are most vulnerable, and advised of a group that are already proactively approaching rough sleepers and beggars to offer help.

It was hoped that there would be results from the Diverted Living Scheme from February to April to bring to April's meeting. Members were advised that it may be possible to invite Kevin Ward, the Manager of the scheme, to the meeting.

The Inspector advised the Members that the Diverted Living Scheme was one of many options, and that the goal was not to cleanse the city of beggars but to help the vulnerable. It was advised that there is a multi-agency approach towards looking at the problem.

Conclusions

The Committee **accepted** the evidence and opinions from the Officers and the Police. They **approved** the consultation strategy proposed and **agreed** to receive the outcomes of the consultation at its meeting in April.

The Members were advised that there could be opportunity to invite representatives from the Wallwich, Shelter Cymru and the Housing Needs Manager for Newport City Council to the meeting in April.

The meeting terminated at 11.38 am