
**REPORT OF THE COMMUNITY SERVICES
SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
14 OCTOBER 2003**

NOTE: Copies of the reports mentioned below have been sent to all members of the Community Services Scrutiny Committee and other members who had requested them. Further copies are available from David Roberts, Room 222, County Secretary's Department, County Hall, Hertford. (Telephone: 01992 555563)
Email: david.roberts@hertscc.gov.uk

1. FIREWORKS TOPIC GROUP - FINAL REPORT

The Committee have considered the final report of the Fireworks Topic Group set up in January 2003.

This summarises the way the Topic Group addressed its remit, the views that it took into consideration, its key findings and eight recommendations to be considered in the light of the new Fireworks Act 2003.

Background

Following concerns expressed by many Herts residents on the issue of fireworks, the former Community Information and Protection Committee set up a Topic Group under the Chairmanship of County Councillor Bryan Hammond, in January 2003, with a remit to:-

- investigate the possibility of fireworks being handled only by trained personnel.
- look at the possibility of imposing restrictions to times when fireworks can be used.
- look at the Private Members Bill – Control of Fireworks (subsequently adopted by the Government) and push the Local Government Association for greater involvement.
- consider restrictions/controls on fireworks that can be purchased freely.
- weigh up the balance between personal liberty and safety/nuisance.
- address issues arising from celebrations by all ethnic groups.

- contact Melanie Johnson MP (the Consumer Minister who supported the Private Members Bill) for her comments.

The Topic Group was informed at its initial meeting that the Government had adopted the Private Members Bill on Fireworks, and the progress of the Bill was then monitored carefully.

The Group subsequently received views, both written and face to face, from a wide spectrum of the public, traders, and other agencies. This enabled them to formulate the following key findings and recommendations:-

Key Findings

- Fireworks are increasing in popularity
- There is a trend towards larger fireworks being used by the public
- A wide spectrum of the public found noise levels caused by fireworks created unacceptable distress
- There is public concern at the trend towards all year round use of fireworks
- The public appears to favour restricting noise levels and the time at which fireworks are used.
- Current regulatory controls do not adequately address the anti-social use of fireworks
- Responsible traders are willing to play their part in current and any future controls on fireworks
- Traders cannot have their registration to store fireworks removed even if convicted of an offence relating to sales/storage

Topic Group Recommendations

- (i) The use and distribution of fireworks should be managed via a licence for high street retailers.
- (ii) The industry should be encouraged to minimise the noise disturbance caused by fireworks, with the possible introduction of legislation to enforce this if necessary. Regulations should be introduced to control large displays.
- (iii) Only licensed operators should be allowed to let off category 3 and above fireworks.
- (iv) The industry should be encouraged to restrict the timeframe in which fireworks are generally available to members of the public.
- (v) A two-tier licensing system relating to categories of fireworks should be introduced i.e. higher fees for the sale of categories 3 & 4.
- (vi) A time limit of 11pm should be imposed for the letting off of external fireworks falling within categories 2, 3 and 4.
- (vii) More enforcement resource should be made available to allow any restrictions to be effective.
- (viii) It should be made possible for traders to have their registration to store fireworks refused, especially if convicted of an offence relating to under age sales or storage.

The Fireworks Act received Royal Assent on 18 September 2003, and this will enable the Secretary of State to make Regulations on a number of issues, most of which are covered in the Topic Groups recommendations. Clearly, in bringing forward any Regulations the Government would consult widely with interested parties.

In the meantime the Topic Group Report has been sent to both the Local Government Association and the Department of Trade and Industry.

Comments of the Scrutiny Committee

The Committee:

- (i) were both impressed and concerned by the level of interest shown by the public, who were mainly opposed to the increase in fireworks use.
- (ii) asked that a press release be prepared and issued to coincide with 5 November celebrations, with particular thanks to the Hemel Hempstead press (who gave wide coverage to this issue, thus generating considerable public interest).
- (iii) asked that the Topic Group report be circulated to all Hertfordshire MPs, Bill Tynan, the MP who sponsored the Private Members Bill, and to all public libraries in the County.

2. POLICE COMMUNITY SUPPORT OFFICERS

The Committee have considered a report, requested at their previous meeting on how the Police Community Safety Officers (PCSOs) initiative would be evaluated, in order that success could be quantified and reported back on a regular basis to the Committee, other elected members, service managers and other agencies as appropriate.

Information

The PCSO initiative was launched on 22 September. 12 staff (10 full time and 2 part time Officers) have been recruited to date and will be joined by one more full time PCSO. This will provide each of the district areas of East Herts, North Herts and Dacorum with four f.t.e. PCSOs.

The following areas are being considered for the deployment of the PCSOs:

Dacorum	Berkhamsted to Tring
	Bovingdon
	Chipperfield
	Markyate
	Flampstead
	Aldbury
	Ashridge

East Herts	Buntingford to The Hadhams
	Puckeridge
	Walkern
	Braughing
	Munden
	Cottered
North Herts	Offa
	Hoo
	Hitchwood
	Ashwell to Royston (rural villages)

Each team will have a vehicle and will patrol its area to ensure high visibility and to respond to identified need.

Listed below are the potential responsibilities for PCSOs. These will need to be reviewed in the light of operating experience.

Reassurance & Minor Disturbances

- To provide a high visibility presence in the deployed area
- To act as a liaison point for residents, businesses as to any concerns relating to crime, fear of crime and anti-social behaviour
- To act as a liaison/signposting service for residents, businesses as to any concerns relating to the general issue of access to services
- To report the evidence of criminal damage, graffiti, fly-tipping and any other issues that residents/businesses raise as concerns
- To defuse potential issues of confrontation and to act as mediator in order to provide a quick and temporary solution
- To require name and address from person(s) acting in a disruptive and anti-social manner
- To confiscate and dispose of alcohol/tobacco and any illegal substances from young persons
- To identify discarded drugs paraphernalia, dispose and record
- To enter any premises to save life and limb or prevent serious damage to property
- To develop links with rural settlements/farming communities to better understand and deal with their concerns
- To organise and lead on the provision of local surgeries so that concerns can be discussed and actioned.

Road/Pavement Safety

- To carry out PACE road checks and stop vehicles as required
- To stop and search vehicles & belongings in areas authorised under the Terrorism Act 2000
- To assist with the identification/removal of abandoned vehicles
- To issue Fixed Penalty Notices for offences of cycling on footways, dog fouling, litter
- To stop vehicles for road worthiness
- To make traffic directions for abnormal vehicles

Ancillary Duties

- To issue Fixed Penalty Notices (FPNs) for offences of disorder (recent govt white paper and await results of existing pilot)
- To liaise with services such as HandyVan, Crime Prevention Officers and specifically with agencies working on distraction burglary to prevent older people/other vulnerable groups from becoming a victim of crime.
- To promote social inclusion

Schools Liaison

- To provide a high-visibility presence around the schools, working in developing and improving relations
- To contribute directly to the school crossing patrol service, as required.
- To work with local school liaison/parent support groups

Comments of the Committee

The Committee:

1. Noted the recently publicised similar scheme which appeared to have increased the fear of crime and recommend that the County Council's scheme should pay particular attention to the way data is collected.
2. Clarified that the two Police Community Support Officer Schemes for rural and urban areas, although funded differently, should address similar concerns. (However this Committee's responsibility is to scrutinise the County Council - funded scheme.)
3. Commended the introductory seminar given for Council Members, but expressed concern that the separate seminars organised by the Constabulary were not available to County Members. The Committee asked the Executive

Member to write to the Police Authority to express the Committee's disappointment.

4. Expressed concern that police ward officers in areas covered by the PCSOs may have less than the full complement of staffing and, notwithstanding the assurances that have been given, that the presence of PCSOs may make it more likely that this situation will continue.
5. Requested officers to seek information on the number of police constables currently in the areas covered by PCSOs and any variation in those numbers in the future.
6. Requested that reports to the Crime Reduction Panel should be emailed to members of the Committee.
7. Requested that a further report be submitted to the March 2004 meeting on progress with the scheme.

JANE HOBDAV
CHAIRMAN
County Hall
Hertford

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