

APPENDIX ONE:

NEIGHBOURHOOD RESOLUTION PANEL SCHEME (NRPS) PROGRESS REPORT

1. Background

- 1.1 This report sets out progress made in relation to the development of the Neighbourhood Resolution Panel Scheme (NRPS) since the previous report to the committee earlier this year in March.
- 1.2 The scheme provides positive outcomes to those affected by crime, ASB or neighbour disputes, by facilitating restorative justice (RJ). RJ is a simple, effective, common sense approach to dealing with conflict. It promotes a better understanding between parties by opening up the lines of communication between the 'harmed' and the 'harmer', enabling them to work together to find some kind of meaningful resolution.
- 1.3 The NRPS has one part-time co-ordinator and currently relies on the availability and commitment of a team of twelve trained volunteer RJ facilitators. The scheme accepts referrals from the police and the council's anti-social behaviour (ASB) team, on a case-by case basis, subject to risk assessments. The scheme co-ordinator and volunteers work in partnership with a number of agency representatives, including police officers, ASB officers, police and community support officers (PCSOs), independent living facilitators, housing officers, environmental health officers and educational staff to work towards finding a positive outcome.

2. Referrals: Progress to date

- 2.1 To date there have been twenty-one referrals since July 2013, six of which are live cases.
- 2.2 Referrals cover a wide range of issues, all of which impact on the day to day lives of the individuals involved. Most are routed in some kind of dispute between neighbours and there are often varied and complex issues associated with the deterioration in the relationships between the parties which naturally takes time to unravel and resolve.
- 2.3 Despite this, good progress has been made and there have been some very positive outcomes. Eighty percent of those who participated and provided feedback were satisfied with the outcome and said that they would recommend the scheme to those in similar situations.
- 2.4 To illustrate the complexities of the types of referral being dealt with by the scheme, two case studies are set out below.

Case Study One

Matter: Common assault

Referred by: Cambridgeshire Police

The parties were parents involved in a dispute about an allegation of bullying involving their children. The school did not feel that there was sufficient evidence of bullying to warrant intervention but had spoken to all parties involved.

The dispute came to a head during an altercation between the parents when one of the parties became verbally and physically abusive to the other and the police attended. The matter was referred by the police to the NRPS.

Both parties agreed to participate. The scheme co-ordinator and volunteer facilitators spent a considerable amount of time with the parents listening to their views, reassuring them and preparing them for a panel meeting. The children were also given an opportunity to contribute. The co-ordinator liaised extensively with the school and in particular with the classroom teacher who was very supportive of the scheme's involvement due to the detrimental effect the dispute was having on both children.

The co-ordinator and volunteers ensured that both parties remained engaged in the process throughout the preparation phase. The date for the panel meeting was set when all parties felt ready to participate, seven weeks after the initial referral.

The panel meeting was initially very tense with neither party willing to listen to the other's point of view. On more than one occasion the parties became angry and emotional.

With the volunteers continued support and encouragement, the parties gradually began to open up and to listen to each other. Both families realised that much of their frustration was borne out of misunderstandings rather than based on fact. They gained a better understanding of the challenges that each other faced and realised that they had much in common. The perpetrator apologised to the victim and together they agreed a plan of action to enable their families to work together to build a more positive relationship. Both parties signed the agreement.

The parties left together on good terms, having agreed to put their differences aside. Feedback following the panel has been very positive, particularly in relation to the interaction between the children at school.

Case Study Two

Matter: Neighbour dispute

Referred by: Cambridgeshire Police

The parties were two families involved in a dispute over noise. One family complained that they were being consistently disrupted by noise from their neighbours' children. Following complaints to the council, and to the police, friction between the neighbours escalated resulting in an altercation between them to which the police were called. The police referred the matter to the NRPS.

The complaints were having a huge impact on the family allegedly at the centre of the noise, particularly on the young mother and her small children. She felt isolated and ostracised by her neighbours. The complainants were also being affected by what they considered to be deliberate noise and were also experiencing hostility from a number of their neighbours.

The co-ordinator and volunteers ensured that both parties had ample opportunity to talk about how they felt during the preparation phase and looked at other appropriate support that could be offered, liaising with the housing officer and other practitioners. One party withdrew from the process, but with the support of the volunteers and co-ordinator, was persuaded to continue.

The panel meeting enabled the families to talk openly about the noise issue and about the impact that it was having on them both. The family against whom the complaints were made brought a supportive neighbour to the meeting who participated fully and made some very helpful contributions.

It transpired that the complainants were mostly concerned that the noise was a deliberate act of hostility towards them, whilst the family being complained about felt the same about the complaints against them. The supportive neighbour highlighted the fact that noise travelled very easily in the flats and that more than one neighbour was likely to be the source of most of the alleged noises. She was also able to provide an insight into the hostility that had infiltrated the wider community, to the point that there was now an obvious divide.

Following extensive discussion, both families were able to acknowledge that the noise was not intentional and it was likely to be emanating from more than one source. They also agreed that the friction between them had escalated largely due to misunderstandings.

The families signed an agreement to say that any complaints about noise would be raised with the supportive neighbour who would try to resolve the situation as quickly and amicably as possible. As the families started to relax and to talk to each other it was also agreed that together they would organise a communal social event for all of the immediate neighbours, to help repair the harm caused and to build more positive relationships and a sense of shared community.

Feedback has been positive and the families have been able to work together to resolve issues as they arise.

2.5 Extracts from some of the feedback received is included below:

Victim feedback –

‘....keep up the good work, it changes peoples lives’

‘We were pleased with the way the volunteers handled the meeting’

‘I can’t thank the volunteers enough for what they did. The outcome couldn’t have been any better. To think they volunteer to do this is amazing’

2.6 It is worth noting that not all referrals proceed to panel. It may be that following initial conversations with the scheme co-ordinator and volunteers, the parties feel that the issues causing conflict have been resolved, and they no longer consider it necessary to meet face-to-face.

2.7 In some circumstances the victim/complainant may be reluctant to engage in a face-to-face meeting but welcomes the support and assistance of the scheme. Consideration may then be given to indirect restorative processes such as telephone conferencing or ‘shuttle RJ’ (where parties communicate via a third party).

2.8 The matter may be assessed as unsuitable following initial discussions and risk assessments (e.g. parties may be considered too vulnerable) or an alternative method (such as ‘Street RJ’ used by the police) may be considered more appropriate. Using a range of restorative approaches can help to support the wishes of victims/complainants whilst also being an effective means of bringing about a successful outcome.

2.9 A summary of referrals to date is set out below.

	Referral type & Referring Agency	Features	Outcome
2013			
July	Neighbour dispute ASB	3 parties Complex history Multi-agency interventions	Prep initiated Parties report dispute resolved and withdrew
August	Neighbour dispute ASB	4 parties (families with young children) Complex history Multi-agency interventions	Prep initiated Panel arranged Parties withdrew due to change in personal circumstances
	Theft Police	2 parties No history Young person	Prep initiated Parties withdrew due to matter being resolved
	Neighbour dispute Police	2 parties Extensive & complex history	Assessed as unsuitable for NRPS
September	Common Assault Police	2 parties Neighbour dispute Complex history Multi-agency intervention including mediation	Prep completed Panel meeting Dec 2013 Signed apology and agreement Positive feedback
	Common Assault Police	2 parties Complex history	Assessed as unsuitable for NRPS
October	Neighbour Dispute Police	3 parties (families with children) Some police intervention	Prep completed Parties reluctant to proceed 'Shuttle RJ' initiated Matter resolved
December	Neighbour Dispute Police	2 parties Complex history Multi-agency intervention	Prep initiated One party assessed as unsuitable for NRPS
2014			
January	Common Assault Police	2 parties (families with children)	Prep completed Panel meeting March 2014 Apology and signed agreement Positive feedback
	Neighbour Dispute Police	3 parties Complex history Police caution	Prep completed Panel meeting April 2014 Signed agreement.
March	Neighbour Dispute ASB	3 parties Special needs Multi-agency intervention Complex history	Prep completed Panel meeting May 2014 Signed agreement Positive feedback
	Neighbour Dispute Police	2 parties	Assessed as unsuitable for NRPS

	Referral type & Referring Agency	Features	Outcome
April	Harassment Self-referral	2 parties Complex history Police intervention	Initial prep & discussion Assessed as unsuitable for NRPS Guidance provided and signposted to appropriate agencies for further advice and support.
May	Neighbour Dispute Police	3 parties Complex history	Prep initiated Party withdrew On hold
	Neighbour Dispute Police	2 parties (families with children) Multi-party intervention	Prep completed Panel meeting Aug 2014 Signed agreement Positive feedback
July	Neighbour Dispute Police	2 parties Multi-agency intervention Complex history	Prep initiated Party withdrew Matter under review
Aug	Neighbour Dispute ASB	5 parties Multi-agency intervention Complex history	Prep initiated Party withdrew due to change in circumstances Matter under review
	Neighbour Dispute Police	2 parties Complex history Police intervention	Prep initiated Party reported issue resolved Matter under review
Sept	Neighbour Dispute ASB	2 parties Complex history Special needs Multi-agency intervention	Initial stages
	Neighbour Dispute ASB - Racial Harassment & Community Cohesion	2 parties Complex history	Initial stages
	Neighbour Dispute ASB	2 parties Complex history Multi-agency intervention	Initial stages

3.0 The overall experience of newly established NRPSs indicates that it can take time to establish a steady flow of referrals whilst processes and procedures embed and confidence in outcomes grows. Since the last report to committee there has been a steady flow of referrals with the likelihood of further increases as development and promotion of the scheme continues over the next twelve months.

4.0 Benefits of the Panel Process

- 4.1 Preparation is key to the success of the panel meeting and often involves considerable time spent discussing the details of the case with the parties and with relevant agency representatives.
- 4.2 Although the preparation phase can be resource intensive, experience shows that it can pay dividends in the long run.
- 4.3 The co-ordinator and volunteer facilitators meet with and maintain regular contact with the parties prior to the panel meeting which helps to allay fears and reassure participants. It also gives everyone the opportunity to tell their side of the story and helps the co-ordinator and volunteers to get to know the issues and to build a rapport.
- 4.4 Volunteers are impartial members of the local community from all walks of life - they are approachable, informal and friendly and their involvement can be a very effective way of encouraging parties in conflict to reach a consensus.
- 4.5 Volunteers are able to talk to, and most importantly to listen, at length, to the parties, particularly victims and complainants, and to respond to their needs. This can help victims and complainants to reflect on the incident, to consider its impact and to make considered informed decisions about what they would like the next steps to be. For offenders/wrongdoers it can encourage them to consider their actions and to take appropriate steps to repair the harm.
- 4.6 For low-level criminal offences the NRPS can form part of an out-of-court disposal (a community resolution or a conditional caution). It fits comfortably within the new Anti-Social Behaviour Act 2014 community remedy 'menu', providing victims and complainants with the opportunity to consider and identify outcomes that best suit their particular needs and circumstances.
- 4.7 The very nature of the scheme promotes partnership working and provides the police and ASB team with a valuable additional mechanism by which to help agree and deliver community resolutions. The parties can decide what works best for them which can increase outcome satisfaction and help prevent escalation, ultimately saving time and the costs associated with repeat interventions by the police and other agencies.
- 4.8 The table below sets out approximate costs of intervention in a typical escalating neighbour dispute, comparing volunteers and practitioners, (police officers, PCSOs and ASB officers), working towards and achieving a positive outcome over an eight week period. Clearly this is illustrative and includes estimations, but it does provide a good indication of the cost differentiation.

4.9 For the purposes of this illustration an average approximate practitioner's salary of £29,500.00 per annum, over a 37 hour weekly contract, has been used which equates to approximately £15.57 per hour.

Two party neighbour dispute	Approximate time (hours)	Cost to NRPS scheme (£)		Practitioner cost (£)
Action taken				
Initial referral	1	Call cost	1.00	15.57
Initial calls to each party	1	Call cost	1.00	15.57
Pre-meeting discussion	1	Call cost	1.00	15.57
Prep meetings with parties	4	Travel cost	4.00	62.68
Prep meetings with supporters etc	2	Travel cost	2.00	31.14
Telephone calls to/from parties	3	Call cost	3.00	46.71
Review casefile/emails /update ECINS	4	N/A		62.68
General information gathering/sharing	4	Call cost	4.00	62.68
Pre-panel discussion	1	Call cost	1.00	15.57
Panel meeting inc prep and travel time	4	Travel cost	4.00	62.68
Two volunteers/practitioners			£21.00 x 2	£390.85 x 2
TOTAL	25 hours		£42.00	£781.70

5.0 The approximations set out above indicate that if, for example, just ten referrals were deemed successful, there would be a potential saving of over £7000 in addition to the longer term savings associated with having resolved the matter effectively, rather than continuing to 'fire-fight'.

6.0 Next steps

6.1 Volunteers

6.2 Following completion of a Restorative Solutions RJ Practitioner training course in March of this year the scheme currently has twelve volunteers. The cost of the three day course provided by Restorative Solutions was £2850 and it effectively doubled the number of volunteers. Two more potential volunteers were successfully interviewed but due to term-time commitments (both are Cambridge University undergraduates) they were unable to attend the course. They, and at least two other candidates, including a former magistrate, have expressed interest in the scheme and in attending further courses.

- 6.3 In theory, because the volunteers work in pairs, at present only six, or seven, referrals can be dealt with at any given time. However, in reality not all of the volunteers will be available at the same time as many tend to be active and engaged members of the community who have a number of commitments and responsibilities outside of their voluntary work.
- 6.4 Dealing with complex multi-party neighbour disputes can involve allocation of more than two volunteers per case over a longer than expected period of time. In addition where there are potential conflicts of interest, volunteers cannot always be appropriately allocated to a case which further limits capacity.
- 6.5 To address this situation it is recommended that other methods of training volunteers are considered and in particular the provision of an internal volunteer training facility.

7.0 Promotion and further development of the NRPS

- 7.1 Work is continuing to promote the scheme and to broaden its scope, to include the development of a dedicated internet page and further promotional material.
- 7.2 Discussions have been initiated with the police press office to raise awareness of the scheme and to include bulletins and updates on the police intranet.
- 7.3 A review of the referral process and procedures will be carried out before the end of the year, particularly in relation to the police referral procedure, to ensure the continued smooth running of the scheme and to encourage more referrals. Events which promote partnership working will also be developed in this regard.
- 7.4 Meetings with housing teams are planned to take place in the next few months to raise awareness of the scheme and to invite referrals.
- 7.5 It is recommended that continued emphasis is placed on promoting the benefits of the scheme, embedding policies and procedures and building on partnership working with the police, ASB and Housing teams, so that referrals to the NRPS, and positive resolutions for victims/complainants, continue to increase steadily over the next twelve months.

8.0 Board of Governance, Monitoring and Evaluation

- 8.1 Work to establish a board of governance was deferred due to elections earlier in the year but it is recommended that this now be revisited with a view to holding the inaugural meeting of the board in 2015.
- 8.2 As referrals start to increase steadily over the next twelve months, it is recommended that a formal method of monitoring and evaluating the scheme be considered in conjunction with the University of Cambridge Institute of Criminology.