

APPENDIX ONE:

Neighbourhood Resolution Panel Scheme (NRPS) Progress report

1.0 Background

1.1 The current NRPS co-ordinator started in post in January 2013, working 18.5 hours per week (Monday to Wednesday). Considerable work was undertaken in the first half of 2013 to:

- establish a framework to manage, train and support volunteer facilitators in line with good practice and,
- to develop an effective method of processing referrals received by the scheme.

1.2 A number of discussions took place to inform this process in particular with the police, the council's anti-social behaviour (ASB) team, Restorative Solutions (a not-for-profit company which provided training for the NRPS volunteer facilitators) and with other established restorative justice (RJ) projects such as Sheffield Community Justice.

1.3 A framework and resource pack for volunteer facilitators was completed in March 2013 which included details of the council's policy on volunteering and provided guidance to volunteers on matters such as confidentiality, safeguarding, personal safety, claiming expenses and so on.

1.4 Progress was also made with regard to shaping the detail of the referral process in consultation with partners, in particular with the police. The referral process was completed in June 2013 and the scheme co-ordinator made a presentation to the Cambridgeshire Constabulary Senior Management Team (SMT) on 25 June to provide an overview and to invite feedback. The presentation was well received and the SMT reaffirmed their commitment to the scheme.

1.5 During August and September 2013, the co-ordinator met with neighbourhood policing sergeants at Parkside Police Station and delivered weekly presentations to the reactive and neighbourhood policing teams in order to promote the scheme and to inform staff of the relevant processes and procedures. The co-ordinator recently shadowed reactive officers to gain an insight into the challenges that they face on a daily basis and how best the NRPS could assist them in their work.

2.0 The referral process

2.1 The objectives of the NRPS are to:

- improve outcome satisfaction levels for those affected by crime and anti-social behaviour and to provide victims and complainants with a greater 'voice'
- maintain/restore community cohesion and to increase public confidence
- encourage wider community engagement and to train and support community volunteers to ensure the sustainability of the scheme
- reduce the risk of re-offending and/or repeated unacceptable behaviour
- encourage and maintain positive agency collaboration

2.2 The scheme focuses on bringing parties together in a restorative meeting, known as a 'panel' which is facilitated by volunteers who have successfully completed the RJ practitioner training provided by Restorative Solutions.

2.3 Referrals to the scheme currently come from the police and the council's ASB team, with a view to broadening this over time (see further detail below).

2.4 Before referring a matter to the scheme, all parties must have given their consent and have expressed a willingness to participate in a panel meeting. The wrongdoer/s must also have accepted some responsibility for their actions. Potential referrals are considered on a case-by-case basis, focusing on the specific circumstances of the case, the needs and wishes of the complainant and any associated risk assessments.

2.5 Matters considered suitable for referral include low-level crime (this would normally include cases with a score of 3 or below on the Association of Chief Police Officers Gravity Score Matrix) and non- crime incidents such as;

- low level criminal damage
- low value theft
- minor assault
- anti-social behaviour
- disorder
- nuisance
- neighbour disputes

2.6 Matters that would not normally be considered suitable include serious assaults, domestic violence and breach of trust cases.

2.7 Once a matter has been referred, the co-ordinator decides whether or not it is suitable for the scheme, in consultation with the referring agency, and, where appropriate, with the Safer Communities Manager.

2.8 An overview of the referral process is attached at Appendix Two.

3.0 The Panel Meeting

3.1 When a matter is referred, the co-ordinator undertakes risk assessments in conjunction with the referring agencies, and identifies two volunteers to co-work to prepare participants and facilitate all aspects of the panel meeting.

3.2 The volunteers meet all those involved on a one to one basis before getting them together in the panel meeting. This gives everyone the chance to tell their side of the story – it also helps the volunteers to get to know the issues and to build a rapport.

3.3 Thorough preparation is key to the success of the panels and more than one prep meeting may be needed to ensure that all of the parties are adequately prepared and ready to participate. Once everyone is happy to proceed, the panel meeting will take place in a neutral venue such as a community centre.

Representatives from referring agencies are welcome to attend and participate.

3.4 The panel itself is quite structured - the wrongdoer is asked to explain their actions and is invited to listen to the views of the complainant. All parties, including appropriate supporters (for example, a parent, partner or friend) and representatives from referring agencies, are given the opportunity to express their views. The volunteers ask a range of set questions commonly used in RJ, such as – tell me what happened, who do you think has been affected, what do you think you need to happen now...and so on. Ground rules for the meeting will have been agreed beforehand and everyone will get a chance to speak. The structure is simple and effective.

3.5 The meeting could take up to an hour, depending on the issues being discussed, and once everyone has had their say, the volunteers will help the parties come to some kind of agreement. This might be anything from an apology through to a written undertaking or a good neighbour agreement. It might be that the wrongdoer does something that benefits the whole community. There are lots of possibilities and over time it is hoped that the scheme will be able to offer a number of reparative options for a range of different circumstances.

3.6 Often, for the victim, simply having the opportunity to 'be heard' is enough to help them to draw a line under the matter and to move on, and for the wrongdoer, it can prove to be a turning point.

3.7 Whatever has been agreed by the parties is recorded in writing and signed by all those involved. The beauty of the scheme is that the parties are encouraged to talk to each other and to work things out face to face, which can help prevent escalation and ultimately save time on repeat visits by the police and other agency interventions.

3.8 Compliance with the agreement is monitored by the scheme co-ordinator and any non-compliance is referred back to the original referring agency to decide how best to deal with the matter.

3.9 Once a panel meeting has been completed, parties are invited to complete a participant feedback form to assist with the monitoring and evaluation of the scheme. The co-ordinator provides the referring agency with feedback as soon as possible following the panel meeting and provides copies of any written agreement within five working days.

4.0 Referrals

4.1 The scheme began to process referrals in July 2013. To January 2014, there have been ten referrals as follows:

- Two referrals were considered to be unsuitable for the NRPS.
- Four are currently being processed, of which one is a common assault and three are neighbour disputes. Three of these have been referred by the police.
- Two referrals are on hold (both long-standing neighbour disputes) due to intermittent engagement by the parties.
- A case of theft was closed because the victim withdrew (she felt the young person involved had reformed).
- A case of common assault referred by the police went to a panel meeting in December 2013 with very positive feedback. The wrongdoer provided a written apology and the parties made efforts following the panel meeting to further repair their relationship.

4.2 Extracts from the feedback received is included below:

4.3 Victim *'...even after the process was over there was further progress with my neighbour, which would not have happened without the panel.....'*

4.4 Wrong doer *.....'I found the panel meeting helpful and to realise how upset and agitated my neighbour was, due to the incident involved. The meeting has made me look at my neighbours needs more...'*

4.5 Both parties said that they would recommend the process to others in a similar situation.

5.0 Volunteer Facilitators

5.1 Twelve volunteers initially completed the Restorative Solutions RJ training course in October 2012, following a successful bid to the Ministry of Justice for their training resource. All volunteers were interviewed and their criminal records checked via the Disclosure & Barring Service (DBS). They have all signed a confidentiality agreement stating that they will not disclose personal and/or sensitive data, or use it for their own or another's benefit without the consent of the party concerned. The co-ordinator and volunteers use the E-CINS database to report on cases and share confidential information in a secure way, which was introduced in August 2013.

5.2 Over the last twelve months, the volunteers have been provided with guidance, training and support including a resource pack, refresher training with Restorative Solutions, support meetings, personal safety training and other relevant courses, as well as regular 1-1 support provided by the co-ordinator as and when it is needed.

5.3 As is usual and expected, some of the volunteers have moved on, largely due to changes in their personal circumstances, and the scheme currently has a team of six volunteers.

6.0 Recommendations for further development of the NRPS

6.1 Co-ordination of the NRPS

6.1.1 The co-ordinator is the main point of contact for the NRPS and it became clear that cover limited to three days (Monday-Wednesday) might impede the effectiveness of the scheme. The police, in particular, expect prompt responses to potential referrals so that they can quickly take decisions about any alternative action. In addition, the co-ordinator was regularly undertaking additional tasks outside of her normal working hours in order to ensure the effective development and running of the scheme.

6.1.2 To address these issues, the co-ordinator commenced an additional four working hours per week (on a Thursday) in November 2013. This helps to ensure that referrals to the scheme, and any issues raised by those involved in the process,

are responded to in a timely and effective manner, which is essential to the on-going development of the scheme. As such, it is recommended that the role of the co-ordinator continues on the basis of a 22.5 hour working week.

6.2 Volunteer Recruitment Campaign

6.2.1 When the NRPS started to receive referrals, it became clear that managing potential conflicts of interest for volunteers was an issue that needed consideration. On four occasions to date, volunteers have had to withdraw due to a potential conflict of interest. Volunteers tend to be active members of their community and/or their employment brings them into contact with a wide range of people. In addition, as many volunteers are in full time employment and have a number of personal commitments, their time is scarce, and valuable, which means that the scheme cannot rely solely on a small team of dedicated individuals for all of its support.

6.2.2 Without more active volunteers, the scheme faces a capacity issue. With six volunteers, the scheme can only deal with three or possibly four referrals at any given time as the volunteers work in pairs on each case.

6.2.3 This has underlined the importance of having a large pool of available volunteers to ensure that the scheme is effective and can respond quickly to referrals. In response to this we are currently running a campaign for new volunteer facilitators, with a view to running a training course in March/April 2014.

6.2.4 Restorative Solutions have provided some additional support and mentoring to the co-ordinator, and to the volunteers, since the provision of the original training in October 2012 and it makes sense for the training of further volunteers to be led by them, and the course tailored to the particular needs of scheme. The cost of training approximately ten new volunteers on a three day RJ course provided by Restorative Solutions is £2850.

6.2.5 It is recommended that a team of approximately ten new volunteers are trained as proposed. Thereafter, as the NRPS becomes more established, and the current team of volunteers become more experienced, it is hoped that the scheme will be able to provide in-house training for further volunteers.

6.3 Scope

6.3.1 The overall experience of newly established NRPSs indicates that the referral process can be slow to take off. However, with one or two successes, referrals start to come in greater volume.

6.3.2 The Sheffield scheme has been working successfully with the police and other agencies since 2009. Following a slow start, referrals in Sheffield are now averaging twenty per month. Sheffield has a population of approximately 500,000 to Cambridge's 130,000 and the scheme currently has a large team of around forty volunteers. Scaling the Sheffield example to Cambridge, referrals are currently as expected, with the likelihood that they will rise to three or more a month once the scheme is more established.

6.3.3 To ensure that this is the case, the process has to be carefully managed ensuring capacity within the volunteer team, as discussed above. Following the very positive feedback from the panel meeting at the end of last year, a steady flow of referrals is now expected during 2014.

6.3.4 Referrals are currently limited to those received from the police and the ASB team. This approach was adopted partly to allow time for processes and procedures to embed before widening the net and partly due to the small number of available volunteers.

6.3.5 Restorative practices can be used beneficially in a wide range of settings, particularly in environments such as educational establishments and residential communities. Good progress has been made with regard to developing links with the police and the ASB team. It is recommended that further work is carried out over the next twelve months to build on this and to promote the work of the scheme, and to invite referrals, from other partner agencies, ensuring that there is a co-ordinated approach to restorative interventions and practices across the city.

6.4 Board of Governance, Monitoring and Evaluation

6.4.1 It is recommended that a board of governance is established to help to steer the continuing development of the scheme, involving representatives from a number of key referring agencies.

6.4.2 In keeping with the tenor of the scheme, it is proposed that governance arrangements will be comprehensive but also "light touch" so that the scheme proceeds with the minimum of bureaucracy and the maximum 'ownership' by complainants and members of the community.

6.4.3 It is anticipated that the board will meet to monitor and advise the scheme on a six-monthly basis, once there is a steady flow of referrals, and will meet on other occasions as necessary. The board will also contribute to an annual report on the progress of the scheme.

6.4.4 Some discussion has taken place with regard to identifying and approaching potential representatives from appropriate bodies such as – the police; fire service; victim support; YOT, magistrates and probation. Further work will be carried out during 2014 with a view to holding the inaugural meeting of the board by the autumn.

6.4.5 The co-ordinator met with Dr.Heather Strang and Professor Loraine Gelsthorpe at the University of Cambridge Institute of Criminology, both of whom reaffirmed their interest in the scheme. Both expressed support for the scheme and a willingness to be involved in its governance and in helping to establish a formal method of monitoring and evaluation the NRPS, once it is more established.

6.5 Promotion of the NRPS

6.5.1 It is recommended that a comprehensive communications strategy is developed to include matters such as establishing a dedicated web page for the NRPS and agreeing a formal launch date for the scheme with attendant publicity. Work will be carried out on this during 2014.

Appendix Two

REFERRAL PROCESS MAP



