

**NORTHAMPTON BOROUGH COUNCIL**

**OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY  
COMMUNITY SAFETY (EVALUATION OF DISPERSAL ORDERS)  
TASK AND FINISH GROUP**

**Thursday, 8 March 2007**

**PRESENT:**

Councillor Brian Hoare (Chair)  
Councillor Andrew Simpson  
Councillor Elizabeth Tavener

Thomas Hall Corporate Manager  
Debbie Ferguson Community Safety Manager  
Tracy Tiff Scrutiny Officer

**1. APOLOGIES**

There were none.

**2. MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 15 FEBRUARY 2007**

Subject to the amendment that there *is* a CASPAR Project in Thorplands, the minutes of the meeting of 15 February 2007 were agreed as a true record.

**3. COUNCILLORS RESPONSES TO THE DISPERSAL ORDER  
QUESTIONNAIRE**

The Task and Finish Group considered responses from Councillor Larratt and Councillor B Markham to the Group's Dispersal Order Questionnaire.

Both Councillors commented that a Dispersal Order outside their ward had had effect on their wards. It was noted that the Dispersal Order in Councillor Larratt's ward – East Hunsbury, was one of the very first to be implemented.

D Ferguson advised that the Police's evaluation of Dispersal Orders is limited and tends to focus on the length of the order, number of persons dispersed, number of young people returned home. The evaluation carried out by the Borough Council is more detailed. The public often perceive Dispersal Orders as a Police activity, not as a partnership.

The Chair undertook to write to Councillors Larratt and B Markham, thanking them for taking the time to complete the Task and Finish Group's questionnaire.

At this point a brief discussion took place regarding the Dispersal Questionnaire results for Castle Ward, Eastfield Ward (Wheatfield Road/Wheatfield Gardens etc) and Eastfield Ward (Broadmead Ave, Greenfield Ave etc).

The Task and Finish Group heard that following the Dispersal Order around the Butts Road shops, rapid response CCTV cameras had been left in situ for three months after the Dispersal Order had ended and had acted as a deterrent.

As part of the Action Group activity on Semilong the Group had instigated a Dispersal Order at the multi use games area. Good communication had taken place with residents. At the end of the Order Councillor Barron had written to every household explaining there had been a reduction in crime and giving contact details for residents use should there be future issues.

#### **4. ISSUES FOR INCLUSION IN THE CHAIR'S FINAL REPORT**

The Task and Finish Group then amended the Chair's draft report, copy attached, for submission to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 27 March 2007.

The meeting concluded at 7:45 pm

## Northampton Borough Council

### Overview and Scrutiny

#### Report of the Community Safety (Evaluation of Dispersal Orders) Task and Finish Group

#### **1 Purpose**

- 1.1 The purpose of the Task and Finish Group was to add value to the Dispersal Order process. A copy of the Scope of the Review is attached at Appendix A.

#### **2. Context and Background**

- 2.1 The Task and Finish Group was established to undertake a short, focussed piece of work over three meetings between January 2007 and March 2007.
- 2.2 The Task and Finish Group was set up to conclude an incomplete piece of work from the previous Overview and Scrutiny system. The previous Overview and Scrutiny Committee had requested an evaluation of Dispersal Orders and the primary aim of the Task and Finish Group was to review the report produced by the Community Safety Team reviewing the first 16 Dispersal Orders initiated in Northampton between February 2004 and September 2005.
- 2.3 The Group agreed that the following areas needed to be investigated and linked to the realisation of the Council's corporate priorities: -
- The effectiveness of reporting on Dispersal Orders
  - Analysis of the 16 areas in the borough that have had Dispersal Orders, links to deprivation
  - Details of repeat Dispersal Orders
  - Details of Exit Strategies
  - Consultation process for Dispersal Orders
  - Anti Social Behaviour interventions within Northampton Borough Council's control
  - Police's views on Dispersal Orders, now and in the future
  - Dispersal Order response statistics
- 2.4 This review links to the Council's corporate priority of making Northampton a cleaner, safer and greener place to live. (Corporate Priority 4 refers).

### **3. Evidence Collection**

In scoping this review it was decided that evidence would be collected from a variety of sources: -

#### **3.1 Community Safety Manager**

The Community Safety Manager provided two inputs to the Task and Finish Group. The initial input was the report prepared for the previous Overview and Scrutiny Committee which covered sixteen Dispersal Orders. The second input was an update to December 2006 and geographical analysis requested by the Task and Finish Group.

#### **Dispersal Order Process and Evaluation of original Dispersal Order Report (February 2004 to September 2005)**

##### **3.1.1 Key evidence from the initial report: -**

- The Police initiates Dispersal Orders having collated all the evidence. A proposed Dispersal Order is sent to the Borough Council who countersigns the Order. A Dispersal Order must be countersigned before it can be implemented. The Community Safety Manager will not countersign a Dispersal Order unless it has been agreed by at least one ward Councillor, and is supported by clear documented evidence of the problem.
- Dispersal Orders are intended to be a short-term measure as part of a longer-term solution. The Government anticipates Dispersal Orders to be used to combat residents' fear of crime.
- At the time of writing the initial report for Overview and Scrutiny there had been 16 Dispersal Orders granted in the borough.
- None of the 16 areas had had an Exit Strategy.
- The report provided statistics on just two Dispersal Order areas. There had been no consultation with the public on the remaining 14 Dispersal Orders to enable an evaluation to take place.
- Warning letters were sent to offenders who breached the Dispersal Order area and their parents/guardians were copied in. Often the parent or guardian will call and express their shock that the young person behaving in such a manner, commenting that they will address their behaviour. A record of all letters sent is kept by the Anti Social Behaviour Unit.
- There is not a designated 'owner' of the outcomes of the Dispersal Orders Report. Northampton Borough Council has chosen to carry out an evaluation, few others have.
- Youth Workers, from YMCA, have asked to find out the views of young people in dispersal areas to enable longer-term solutions to be identified.
- Many residents feel that although Dispersal Orders make them feel safer and reduce the fear of crime, they are apprehensive that

once the Dispersal Order has ended that the problems will reoccur.

- The success of Dispersal Orders is dependant on resources available to police the areas and the Police has indicated that it will not support a Dispersal Order unless it feels that it can support the implementation.

### **Further Analysis of Dispersal Orders up to December 2006**

- 3.1.2 The Task and Finish Group requested two maps of the Borough detailing the areas and levels of deprivation across the town and the 28 Dispersal Order areas that have been implemented up to December 2006.
- 3.1.3 It was identified that there has been one repeat Dispersal Order in Kings Heath which is one of the most deprived areas and has received a lot of resources.
- 3.1.4 The Dispersal Order in St David's ward resolved the problem of anti social behaviour (harassment, threatening behaviour, underage drinking and vehicle damage) quickly. This Order was supported by the installation of a CCTV camera in the shopping area.
- 3.1.5 There is a lot of juvenile nuisance and criminal damage in Eastfield. A community shop will open shortly and there is now a Safer Community Team and Neighbourhood Co-ordinator for the area.
- 3.1.6 There are crime problems in Briar Hill and Thorpelands. The Police will increase patrols in these areas. There is currently a CASPAR project in the Thorplands area. The Police prescribes 'red routes' to high crime areas.
- 3.1.7 The main problem in Briar Hill is motorcycle nuisance and burglary.
- 3.1.8 A Dispersal Order was not implemented on the Racecourse as it was felt it could displace the problem into surrounding residential areas.
- 3.1.9 There have been three Anti Social Behaviour Orders (ASBO's) in Eastfield but these are due to come to an end on 31 March 2007.
- 3.1.10 Castle ward is within the 5% most deprived wards in the country. It has been awarded £4 million of funding from 2006, for the next four years.
- 3.1.11 When reviewing the maps it was observed that Dispersal Orders had not occurred in several wards where they may have been anticipated i.e. Lumbertubs and Thorplands and it was concluded that this reflected the level of policing in these areas and the provision of diversionary activities. Approximately three years ago an audit of youth facilities for 8-13 year olds in the town was undertaken and if further work on Dispersal Orders is undertaken then it might be appropriate to correlate with youth facilities provision.

### **Repeat Dispersal Order areas**

3.1.12 The only area in Northampton that has had a Dispersal Order repeated is Kings Heath, around and including the shopping area of Park Square. The original Order ran from 21 October 2004 to 20 January 2005. There was positive feedback from the community and a reduction in anti-social behaviour but the Police still felt there were issues that needed to be resolved as it was still receiving calls from the public. This led to a further application being made for the period 22 February 2005 to 21 April 2005.

3.1.13 Duston has had three Dispersal Orders. A multi Agency Group was set up within six months after the end of the last Dispersal Order. It was very successful and its positive effects are still evident.

### **Exit Strategies**

3.1.14 When reviewing the range of Dispersal Orders it was a concern to find that Exit Strategies were not established when preparing and applying for the Orders.

3.1.15 Since March 2006, Joint Action Groups (JAGs) have been set up in some of the Dispersal Order areas, to look more closely at the issues and identify actions that can be undertaken to address some of the problems. The Groups usually operate for a six-month period and are working well. An evaluation undertaken following the completion of work by the Duston Group showed a 14% reduction in overall crime, and early indications of the Semilong Group's work showed that there is an overall reduction in crime of 20%. There are currently three other Groups working in the areas of St James/Castle, Bellinge and Eastfield.

3.1.16 Unless Exit Strategies are in place for all Dispersal Orders they cannot serve their purpose of providing a "breathing space" for longer-term resolution of the problems.

### **Consultation process for Dispersal Orders**

3.1.17 It was resolved by Northampton Borough Council's Executive of 10 May 2004 *'that the Chief Executive, Borough Solicitors or any Director be authorised to give the Councils consent to the issue by a relevant police officer of an authorisation under Part 4 of The Anti-Social Behaviour Act 2003'*.

3.1.18 In line with the legislation, any application received by Northampton Borough Council from the Police should be supported by:

- Clearly highlighted map of identified area
- Detailed reason for requesting the Order

Provision of significant recorded evidence of incidents of:

- Anti-social behaviour within the identified area.
- Consultation has taken place with local Councillors and written support/agreement included from at least one of them.
- Consultation with residents/groups has taken place.

3.1.19 The Anti-Social Behaviour Unit acts as the 'gatekeeper' for applications for Dispersal Orders and will not accept them if the above criteria has not been met. This is then further checked by the Community Safety Manager before seeking approval and signature. Dispersal Orders cannot go ahead if Northampton Borough Council does not approve them.

### **Anti Social Behaviour interventions within Northampton Borough Council's control**

3.1.20 A multi-Agency approach has been adopted in the application of intervention work. It is co-ordinated through the Anti-Social Behaviour Unit, Northampton Borough Council in consultation with partner Agencies through the six weekly NASBAG (Northampton Anti-Social Behaviour Action Group) meetings.

The following types of intervention are used:

- Early warning letters
- Acceptable Behaviour Contracts
- Notices of Seeking Possession (Housing)
- Outreach Youth Work
- Family Intervention via the U-Turn Project
- Local Action Groups
- Dispersal Orders
- Injunctions
- Anti-Social Behaviour Orders

## **3.2 Northants Police**

3.2.1 A representative from Northants Police attended the meeting on 15 February 2007, a copy of the minutes of the meeting are attached at Appendix B. The key points of evidence are:

- Dispersal Orders provide a short-term solution to assist in resolving a long-term problem. It gives the partner Agencies time to get together to solve the problem.
- The evidence gathering process needs to be improved; incidents are not always logged but it is envisaged that the Safer Community Teams (SCTs) and extended Police family should be able to assist in this process.

- The Police suggested that the central collection point for such incidents should be the Anti Social Behaviour Unit.
- Dispersal Orders should only be used when other initiatives have been unsuccessful.
- Exit Strategies need to be put in place as part of the creation of Dispersal Orders and set up when the Dispersal Order is considered. It is important that good practice is encouraged.
- Safer Community Teams should negate the need for Dispersal Orders. Multi Agencies\* should deal with the problem before it gets to the Dispersal Order stage.  
(\*Northampton Borough Council, Northants Police, Community Safety Unit, Anti Social Behaviour Unit, Youth Workers, Ward Councillors, Chairs of Residents Associations, head teachers of local schools, education officers, welfare officers and housing officers).
- The Police is responsible for identifying the problem and will initially lead the Dispersal Order process. The process has to be supported by a Police Superintendent and a local Councillor. The Community Safety Manager has to sign off all Dispersal Orders.
- The Police recognises the need to monitor and measure the performance of Dispersal Orders but acknowledge that there have been failures in the past.
- Measuring displacement is anecdotal, for example, the Dispersal Order at Semilong displaced to the Race Course. If it is the same group of young people that has displaced the Police will look at Anti Social Behaviour Initiatives.
- The Police looks at whether it will be able to enforce Dispersal Orders, but this should not be a limiting factor. With the establishment of Safer Community Teams it should be easier to organise the policing of support for Dispersal Orders. However, this should not be the sole responsibility of Safer Community Teams the responsibility should lay with the wider Joint Action Group.
- The Police recognises that Dispersal Orders need to be evaluated, but acknowledged that this had not been achieved. The Police is committed to improving the situation working with the other partners.
- The Police implements different operational approaches to policing a Dispersal Order area which could include a zero tolerance, or normal supervision by Community Beat Officers. Often just publicising a forthcoming Dispersal Order will alleviate the problem.

### **3.3 Ward Councillors**

- 3.3.1 The Group invited ward Councillors to provide details of Dispersal Orders in their wards and whether they had been involved, details of any Exit Strategies, whether a Dispersal Order outside their ward had had an effective on their ward and the Councillors' awareness of the Dispersal Order process. A response was received from just two Ward Councillors in Headlands and East Hunsbury. Copies of the Ward Councillors responses are attached at Appendix C.



- 3.3.2 Both Councillors commented that they believed a Dispersal Order outside their ward had had effect on their wards.
- 3.3.3 It was disappointing to only receive two responses from the Councillors but this perhaps indicates the level of engagement that most Councillors have with Dispersal Orders that have been implemented to date.

#### **4. Conclusions**

After all of the evidence was collated the following conclusions were drawn: -

- 4.1 When the Dispersal Order process was first implemented in Northampton, the monitoring process was not robust. However, the evaluation and monitoring process has improved and the evaluation undertaken by Northampton Borough Council is now very comprehensive.
- 4.2 There is a need to ensure that ward Councillors receive proper communication and are engaged with regard to proposed Dispersal Orders within their wards. Councillors also need to be provided with guidance and assistance explaining how they can become involved in the Dispersal Order process. A flow chart detailing the Dispersal Order process would be useful, it could be widely circulated to ward Councillors and published on the Council's website.
- 4.3 There are some links with areas of deprivation to Dispersal Orders but the link is weaker than was expected.
- 4.4 The effectiveness of Joint Action Groups (JAGs), in areas where there had been a Dispersal Order was noted. It will be easier to set up JAGs in Neighbourhood Management Teams but there is a need to ensure that they are also set up if a Dispersal Order is considered in a co-ordinated area.
- 4.5 The Borough Council 'owns' the Dispersal Order process as part of its contribution to the Safer Stronger Partnership but it needs to be seen as a partnership approach. The role of Neighbourhood Management Teams and the role of JAGs should be re-enforced.
- 4.6 From the evidence provided the assumption was made that there appears to be a relationship between Dispersal Orders and the provision of youth facilities in the town.
- 4.7 Dispersal Orders are a part of the wider plan to dealing with anti social behaviour however, for them to be effective they must contain Entry and Exit Strategies. These must be planned and agreed by all parties at the beginning of the process.
- 4.8 There is a need for more Police statistical data to be provided when an evaluation of a Dispersal Order is undertaken. This data should

be provided by the ComPaSS unit. A copy of the evaluation should be circulated to all stakeholders.

- 4.9 The Anti Social Behaviour Unit when reporting to the Community Safety Partnership should include a summary of the evaluation of Dispersal Orders as part of their feedback.
- 4.10 The evaluation of the Dispersal Order process should be reported to the Joint Action Groups (JAGs) so that they can feed back the information to residents. Due to the sensitivity of some of the data, a précis version needs to be put together for residents' information.
- 4.11 The Task and Finish Group established that the Dispersal Order procedure is just one sort of intervention to achieve improved community safety. It would be a legitimate objective to eliminate Dispersal Orders as this would equal success and indicate that anti social behaviour problems were resolved at an earlier stage.
- 4.12 It would be beneficial for this report to be used as part of the Councillor Induction process as it details the Dispersal Order process and the launch of the Safer Community Teams.

## **5 Recommendations**

The Task and Finish Group recommends to Cabinet to that: -

- 5.1 Borough Councillors receive more training and understanding of the Dispersal Order process if they are to perform their community leadership role effectively.
- 5.2 The Anti Social Behaviour Unit contributes to the Councillor Induction explaining how Councillors should engage in the Dispersal Order process. A copy of this report will be used as part of the Councillor Induction process.
- 5.3 Greater emphasis should be placed by the Police on reporting of Dispersal Orders. The ComPaSS Unit will be asked to provide statistical data before a Dispersal Order is implemented, during and once it has been completed. This data will inform the evaluation process.
- 5.4 Prevention is better than cure. Joint Action Groups (JAGs) will engage with the community and inform residents prior to the implementation of a Dispersal Order. Resolution of the problem rather than implementing a Dispersal Order is the preferred outcome.
- 5.5 Entry and Exit Strategies will form an integral part of the Dispersal Order Process. They will be formulated at the planning stage and without them the Dispersal Order is not an effective long-term intervention in the improvement of community safety.

- 5.6 Monitoring and reporting back are essential elements in the process of improving community confidence. The Portfolio Holder for Business Intelligence, E-Government and People Support will present regular reports, including a summary of the evaluation of Dispersal Orders to the Community Safety Partnership (CSP).
- 5.7 It is also essential to improve the confidence of local communities following a Dispersal Order. Therefore a précised evaluation report will be sent to the local residents with details of ongoing plans to maintain community safety.
- 5.8 The provision of diversionary youth facilities appears to be a potential contributor to the resolution of problems and therefore the lack of need to implement Dispersal Orders. The Portfolio Holder with responsibility for Community Safety will ensure that there is a programme to improve youth facilities across Northampton as an “invest to save programme”.
- 5.9 Northampton Borough Council, and other Agencies, will work towards zero Dispersal Orders and see this as a success with problems being resolved at an earlier stage. If Dispersal Orders are used it indicates that problems are being allowed to escalate where this level of intervention is required.
- 5.10 The Anti Social Behaviour Unit and the Police liaise to consider if there needs to be a change in responsibility of monitoring incidents of individual anti social behaviour and the consideration of an ASBO.