

West Berkshire LPA IAG Meeting Minutes

DATE: 12th December 2023 TIME: 6pm

LOCATION: Hybrid

1. Welcome and Introductions:

AKC

AKC – IAG Chair
JG – IAG Member
BZ – IAG Member
MP – IAG Member
KP – IAG Member
AB – IAG Member
NH – IAG Member
HK – TVP
MG - TVP
Apologies: SG – IAG vice Chair

IAG membership

In the New Year, there are upcoming additions of two members to represent disability/children and domestic abuse. There's also interest from someone to represent the transgender community, however, there's still a vacant spot for a representative from the homeless community.

2. Previous notes/actions:

All

Action: BZ and NH to work together to develop questionnaire for the five hotels for residents to bring back to group to understand their concerns. Ongoing. *The Regency Hotel is scheduled for closure by the end of December for a refit. To support individuals who have become homeless due to this closure, tents have been donated, and as of now, there haven't been reported problems. The group has connections with this community and pledges to collaborate closely to resolve any arising issues promptly.*

Action: EE - VAWG item 4 publicised information to be shared with IAG so they can circulate it to their members. The 21/22 VAWG Strategy plan was too confusing. The new one is much easier to understand. EE is the lead for VAWG. Action: EE to summarise on 1 page the new 23/24 VAWG strategy plan. *HK to chase.*

Comms needs to put out there including social media on any positive engagement and police being proactive, so the public can see we are being supportive, as there is a lot of negativity in the press. It was discussed that force comms would take too long so need to do at a local level. NWN and Kennet radio is popular with local people. Action: IAG members to send out communication highlighting key items. *This is an ongoing action. The IAG is cautious about the messaging approach. HK will focus on internal communications. The IAG serves as a channel both for sharing information with the public and for the public to communicate with them. A recent example demonstrated a quick response to a burglary incident by organising a community event, showcasing their collaborative efforts and responsiveness to address community concerns. This illustrates the effectiveness of the teamwork within the IAG.*

Establishing a dedicated social media page is a desired goal for this group. Events like the Race Action Plan and Violence against women and girls were organised by IAG members, not the police. However, it's essential for the IAG to be cautious as they're not official police representatives. While TVP's communications are shared within IAG members' communities, there were plans by the SIAG to pilot communications in West Berkshire about a year ago, but it hasn't materialised due to some reluctance from the TVP communications team to attend meetings and concerns about message overload. This action is now closed.

A discussion took place on the Next-door app, which doesn't leave a trace and doesn't allow police responses. To address this, IAG members are now disseminating key information using other platforms like Facebook or Twitter and guiding members on which official sites to follow. The neighbourhood watch teams seem to be managing the Next-door app well. This action is now closed.

Action: HK to send members information on what the different crime types are for education. *HK to obtain specific information to send out.*

Action: HK to expand on Honor base violence and disabilities at next meeting. *HK discovered approximately 95 cases initially reported as disablist hate crimes, but upon review, only around 10 should have been officially recorded as such. Rectifying this discrepancy in the recording of these incidents is a significant task that they are in the process of addressing, although they haven't been able to review all cases yet. This action is now closed.*

3. Members Feedback / Issues to raise:

All

Israel-Palestine conflict

Since the last meeting, there have been increased concerns about the Israel-Palestine conflict, but no reported incidents have occurred. The discussion around this sensitive issue poses a risk that a miscommunication or misstep from someone could potentially disrupt the excellent teamwork that has been carried forward into the community. While there haven't been any specific incidents, the underlying tensions surrounding this contentious issue are still present and concerning.

TVP promptly established a full Gold Command structure when the issue started emerging several months ago. This structure includes an Assistant Chief Constable (ACC) as the Gold Commander, overseeing the response. There's also a Chief Superintendent serving as the Silver Commander. Under this framework, there are leads from various departments and local police areas. In the initial stages, they engaged in scoping discussions with individuals like AKC and SG to identify urgent issues and scanned the local and wider areas for tensions. TVP rigorously monitors every hate crime, utilising specific search methods to identify pertinent information. They employ a filtering process for each incident, to swiftly identify and respond to any emerging issues or concerns. This Operation is known as Operation TARLAC.

At a local level, TVP conduct a daily force meeting where this issue holds a standing agenda item. Each Local Police Area (LPA) receives emails listing all relevant offences. Since the start, only three crimes recorded under Operation TARLAC in West Berkshire have been identified. These cases are reviewed, and despite being exceptionally low-level, they are carefully considered to determine the appropriate response at the LPA level.

There have been verbal altercations and notable disorder in several Local Police Areas (LPAs), with significant protests and criminal damage particularly observed in Oxford. However, MG and his neighbourhood team haven't experienced such challenges. They're diligently reporting on community tensions every day, but now this reporting has shifted to a weekly format that goes to the Home Office.

Despite the absence of manifested offences or protests, it's acknowledged that the underlying tensions might still persist. Currently, there's a low-key weekly protest in the town centre on Thursdays, but it hasn't led to community tensions. Instead, the community seems to be supportive rather than disruptive.

For the protests, there's a distinct command structure focusing on intelligence and risk assessment, tailored specifically for these events. Larger protest areas have been managed by level two public order officers, while some areas, haven't required significant police presence—only a check by neighbourhood officers initially. If anyone senses tensions, reporting it through AKC would allow it to be included in the Force wide tensions report, aiding in monitoring and maintaining awareness of the overall situation.

Bibby Stockholm

Today, there was a suicide on the Bibby Stockholm. A discussion was held around conducting a survey in hotels to understand emerging issues, allowing the IAG to provide support. The problem lies in the lack of mental health and trauma support for these individuals who have experienced significant challenges. Currently, there are no services available to assist them, and this is the critical issue being faced at the moment.

There's was an offer to explore resources from a substantial psychology team and relevant professionals to dedicate time to assist with trauma-based work or any specific issues related to the situation at hand. Coordinating this offer within the IAG is considered valuable but might also require engaging with Health services, as previous attempts to address this issue through Health discussions haven't progressed. While there's a question about whether this falls within the IAG's direct role, there's a suggestion to use the IAG's platform to advocate, push, and highlight concerns to the Council and Health services. The aim is to leverage the IAG's collective voice to prompt action and emphasize the need for attention to this matter.

The responsibility for certain issues doesn't solely fall on the IAG or the police but involves multiple partners. Despite this, the sentiment is that if the IAG feels deeply concerned and wants to make progress, they can act as a voice and advocate for these issues. While they may not possess direct power, they aim to voice their concerns to influential figures within the local authority who might have the ability to address these concerns. AKC, as the chair of the IAG, will write a letter to emphasise the concerns of the IAG regarding the risks faced by these vulnerable groups. HK to find the appropriate contact person.

Community Speed Watch

Community Speed Watch is actively operating in various parts of West Berkshire, notably in the northern area of Newbury. However, there have been instances where motorists have reacted negatively, stopping and even verbally abusing the volunteers operating the speed guns. While the situation hasn't escalated significantly, it's worth noting that these incidents are occurring quite regularly and should be kept in view. Feedback from these incidents, especially if registration numbers are noted, could potentially go back to the coordinator. Interestingly, the data collected during these operations has revealed instances of speeding vehicles lacking MOTs, but addressing vehicle issues isn't within their scope. The Community Speed Watch operations are coordinated and officially documented online, with approval received before each session. There's coordination with the police's speed watch coordinators to avoid overlapping sessions visibly. The increased frequency of these operations is raising concerns about potential threats or confrontations. There's a suggestion that if reports gather vehicle details and driver descriptions, these could be passed to the police for Intel reports. The police are willing to intervene and visit these individuals if needed, as this initiative aims to serve the community and shouldn't provoke such reactions.

4. Neighbourhood Policing Team Updates:

MG

Overall, there haven't been significant changes since the last update, and it's been a relatively safe year, perhaps one of the safest. There's been a notable decrease in serious crimes and those that typically concern people. However, typical community issues like lower-level crimes such as speeding remain a challenge to address. The year's resource constraints, especially for neighbourhood officers covering frontline duties, have impacted their ability to tackle these issues effectively. There's hope for improvement next year as there's an expected increase in resources for the neighbourhood teams and a healthier allocation of resources for the ICR position.

The focus is shifting towards addressing lower-level community issues that have been highlighted, like anti-social behaviour, speeding, and improper parking around schools. Efforts have been made to engage with the community through "Have Your Say" events, totalling 46 since April. The community is encouraged to request such events in local centres, clubs, or town centres to address concerns and ensure police presence.

Additionally, there's continued attention on ongoing matters like violence against women and girls, with a new focus on combatting shoplifting during the holiday season and into the New Year. However, progress on the Race Action Plan has slowed, and there's a need for assistance to engage more effectively with identified communities.

Our neighbourhood priorities at the moment remain and as it generally has been for the last year around an estate in Newbury. We're doing a lot of proactive work up there and we've just had £300,000 funding to improve the area, making it a bit of a nicer place to live and getting the community a bit more pride in the area. We are the highest in the force for successful stop checks and number of successful patrols being carried out. It may be a detriment to some of the other areas but at the moment, that's the focus and that's where people told us that they're feeling unsafe.

The police have been active online, notably with the recent communication about E-scooters that garnered substantial attention with around 133,000 comments. This issue has become quite contentious and is currently a focus for law enforcement due to its impact and annoyance to the public. While acknowledging the importance of addressing this concern, it's challenging to allocate continuous 24/7 attention to it. However, repeated instances of anti-social behaviour related to E-scooters prompt police response and action.

In West Berkshire, there isn't a significant issue with exploitation or knife crime compared to some neighbouring areas. While occasional incidents occur, there isn't a prevalent problem with habitual knife carriers or known gangs in the area. This situation presents a fortunate position for the region.

Mental Health Support Officers

There are now two dedicated officers focused on mental health support within the police force, aiming to assist the most vulnerable members of the community. Often, issues involving these individuals become police concerns, although they primarily require mental health support. This initiative aims to alleviate these situations, supporting frontline officers in handling these cases and addressing the needs of repeat callers, acknowledging the complexities and challenges within this field.

Safeguarding Team

The safeguarding team is proactive, promptly addressing any reports, even at the lowest level, by engaging directly with schools. This approach differs from other areas where engagement might occur only after a major incident. The success of this proactive engagement in schools has led to plans to expand and develop the safeguarding team into a harm reduction unit over the next year or so.

The police's role within schools, was discussed with some perceiving it as primarily the school's responsibility regarding safety issues. However, in cases where a child's safety is compromised, it's clear that the situation has become critical. While most incidents typically stay within the school's domain, in severe cases like these, involving physical safety, it might surpass the school's jurisdiction. To shed more light on this matter and clarify the protocols and guidance schools follow regarding such incidents, there's a plan for a presentation during the next IAG meeting. This aims to ensure everyone is informed about the guidelines and procedures in place regarding safety concerns within schools.

Have your say events

Similar concerns are raised during "Have Your Say" events, notably the perception that the fear of crime exceeds the actual risk in the area. Efforts are made to provide reassurance that the community is relatively safe, even when going out at night or in town. The actual likelihood of harm is minimal, but people's perceptions contrast significantly.

IAG events

The Race Action Plan event was held at the Waterside back in June, with plans for a follow-up event. Similarly, with the Violence against women and girls event, plans to move forward have been delayed. There's an intent to re-engage and progress these important conversations in the New Year.

Burglaries

There has been a recent spate of burglaries where there's a connection noted between these incidents involving the use of bleach, potentially to cover tracks or erase evidence. There were four incidents in one night. Offenders linked to these crimes, arrested in Derbyshire, are believed to be involved in offences across the country. However, official attributions to specific incidents from various forces are pending additional forensic and investigative work. Despite this, there's confidence in the connection due to a halted series of burglaries upon their arrest. Forensic analysis and longer-term inquiries are ongoing to solidify these connections. This trend in criminal behaviour often involves offenders moving across counties, avoiding main roads and ANPR cameras by utilising backroads. Pursuing them is challenging due to their familiarity with routes, use of false plates and identities, and a history of professional burglary, similar to a past criminal generation. Recovering stolen property becomes more challenging with these transient offenders compared to local ones.

5. LPA Commanders Update:

HK

The efforts to tackle violence against women and girls (VAWG) have shown promising results. Despite fewer reported incidents, the reduction in charges stands out, showing a 34% decline compared to the same period last year. The ongoing work isn't just limited to a dedicated VAWG month but involves continuous collaborative efforts between the police and partners to prevent such incidents.

The reduction in charge rates has been influenced by delays in receiving advice from the CPS for charging and victims disengaging from the process before reaching that stage. The CPS, as a critical partner, has faced significant staffing challenges and operational strains within a tight seven-day period. Previously, when a domestic violence suspect was in custody, immediate contact with the CPS would result in a charging decision. This allowed for swift charges against the offender, ensuring their appearance in court either the following day or within a month, maintaining victim engagement throughout. There has been a significant increase in waiting times for charging decisions, particularly for medium or high-risk cases involving suspects in custody for domestic violence. In some instances, it can now take up to 4-5 months to reach a charging decision, an aspect that's entirely beyond police control. The prolonged process adds to the distress of domestic violence victims, having to endure lengthy periods before the CPS reviews the case and decides on court proceedings. Maintaining victim engagement is crucial, and efforts are made to keep victims involved through contracts and regular contact. However, despite these measures, challenges persist. There's a review meeting planned to investigate the situation further and understand the factors affecting positive outcomes.

The AIU handles numerous very low-level offences, including some involving children that are not prosecutable. Year to date, they've dealt with around 400 such cases. Understanding the proportions and the nature of these cases is essential, as many are low-level offences unlikely to result in formal charges, despite being investigated by the unit.

There's been a concerning increase in hate crimes across all categories compared to last year. Specifically, instances of disablist hate crimes have shown a significant spike, officially reported as 26 cases. However, there are concerns about the accuracy of this figure due to a recording issue. Instances where victims mention disabilities during calls are being incorrectly logged as hate crimes related to disability, even if the crime itself isn't tied to their disability. This discrepancy suggests a need to thoroughly investigate and rectify the recording process to ensure accurate statistics.

There's been a significant increase in Honor Based Violence (HBV) instances, rising by 100%, although the actual numbers are currently low, with only two cases reported. Notably, there haven't been any reported cases of Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) or forced marriages within this period.

Stop and Search

There's been increased proactive efforts in specific areas and addressing drug dealing, leading to positive Stop and Search outcomes and reports that largely correspond to those targeted areas. The outcomes for stop and search activities continue to be lower compared to other force areas. Despite this, there's a recognition of the importance of robust policing and conducting stop and search as a deterrent, even if no illicit items are found. The emphasis remains on encouraging proactive policing and conducting searches when there's certainty about finding something. Ensuring a balance between being proactive and not discouraging officers from conducting searches is key. Additionally, repeated searches on the same individuals prompt further investigation to understand the underlying reasons. The recorded disproportionality in our stop and search figures is often linked to specific operations and contexts. For instance, certain operations may involve a particular profile of offenders, leading to a temporary spike in disproportionality. However, these searches are justified based on intelligence and specific circumstances, ensuring confidence in the decision-making process.

Stop and search panel review

During the review of stop searches, the feedback is that they were conducted professionally and effectively. There weren't any specific issues that stood out, but it would be beneficial to feed back to communities that these searches are performed with compassion and a professional approach from the police. Learning to be shared with all IAG members to offer a positive message about the police's challenging work, reasons behind their actions and the importance of informing the public when body cameras are active during interactions to ensure transparency and manage public reactions.

Hate Crime v Hate Incidents

Hate crime encompasses incidents where victims perceive an event occurred due to their protected characteristics, including disability, ethnicity, religion, and sexuality. It's differentiated from hate incidents, which aren't recorded crimes but are still perceived as motivated by these characteristics. For example, if a theft occurs alongside racially abusive language, both the theft and the verbal abuse are recorded as separate incidents. Unfortunately, instances of racial abuse against police officers have also occurred. However, there's been a positive step forward with one recent case where an individual pleaded guilty to racially abusing an officer, sending a strong message that such behaviour won't be tolerated towards the public, shop staff, or officers. HK expressed concern regarding the accuracy of disability crimes data and prefers to investigate further before sharing it.

6. AOB

The Youth IAG was closed toward the end of the previous year due to the majority of children involved moving on. There are plans to revive it, potentially partnering with Newbury College to relaunch the initiative and advance its objectives. This effort is unique as it's the only IAG focusing specifically on youth-related matters.

HK's departure is unfortunate as she was just settling in and gaining familiarity with the LPA and its partnerships. However, the good news is that her replacement, will be permanently stationed here, bringing continuity. HK expressed gratitude for the warm welcome and support from the IAG, hoping that the new Superintendent will continue the positive momentum. The IAG members thanked HK for her brief yet valuable support during her tenure, wishing her well and acknowledging the positive impact she brought to the group.

Next Meeting Date: 19th March 2024 at 6pm via Hybrid