

Muirhouse/Silverknowes joint meeting re youth disturbances

City Chambers Thursday 15 December 2011

Present

Councillor Steve Cardownie (chair), Councillor Kate MacKezie, Councillor Cammy Day, Councillor Allan Jackson, Councillor Elaine Morris, Councillor Norman Work

Inspector John Cooper, Inspector Ian Davis – Lothian & Borders Police

Larry Fraser, Rod Alexander – Davidsons Mains & Silverknowes Residents Association

Roy Douglas, Sr Ann Buckeridge – Muirhouse Salvesen Community Council

Jon Black, Gwen Chrystal – Tenants & Residents in Pilton

Natalie Hoy, Peter Strong, Frances McCormack – CEC, Services for Communities

Andrew McBride, Paul Devaney – CEC, City Development

Background

- Residents in Silverknowes raised concerns about high incidence of youth disturbances and vandalism in area at Cllr MacKenzie's surgery and public meeting organised by Cllr MacKenzie and Chaired at her request DMSRA on 17 November
- A number of actions agreed at public meeting, including increased Police and Council presence, improved streetlighting, and installation of temporary CCTV. However greatest public demand was for closing off access between Silverknowes and Muirhouse at Silverknowes Eastway, and it was agreed that a Safer by Design survey would be carried out by Council and Police to examine this
- Through access was a planning condition for development of the site, is required under Council planning policy and national development policy guidance, and was a condition of adoption by the Council of the roads and footways within the site. There are 3 accesses – east west cyclepath and footway from Muirhouse Drive to Silverknowes Eastway, north south footway alongside former janitor's house between Muirhouse Gardens and Silverknowes Eastway, and locked gate between Millenium Park and Silverknowes Eastway

Discussion

- Silverknowes residents confirmed that there had been a spate of stone throwing at windows, attempted break-ins and vandalism to cars, also describing a gang of youths marching down the road of Silverknowes Eastway. Their preferred solution was blocking off access, as they felt this was the only way to guarantee their security now and in the longer term
- Muirhouse residents acknowledged youth issues as a problem in the area under discussion at the meeting but also in a wider sense, and felt reductions in youth provision had exacerbated problems. They questioned the need for blocking off access as it was part of the safer routes to school network, and noted issues of anti-social behaviour at a rented property in Silverknowes Eastway, youths from Silverknowes coming to Muirhouse shops to buy alcohol, and groups of youths gathering at the east west access where shrubs needed cut back

- Police confirmed that there had been a number of youth disturbance issues in West Edinburgh, which had moved from one location to another and were currently manifesting in Davidsons Mains at Tescos and Silverknowes. Police view was that none of the options being considered would impact adversely on policing, and that blocking off access might prevent some problems in the immediate vicinity of Silverknowes Eastway as youths wouldn't use this as a through route. Police confirmed that weekend of 17/18 December was the last weekend enhanced patrols would take place although indicated that they would work across the teams in North and West to ensure a response service was in place.
- Possible longer term benefits of streetwork and youth diversionary activities were noted
- Social consequences of blocking off access were noted – safer routes to school, residents' access to shops in both areas and library and potential new health partnership centre in Muirhouse, as well as undesirability of neighbouring communities being separated by a barrier
- An option might be to put in gates at some or all of the accesses which could be open during the day and closed at night – possible issues in late night access to Silverknowes from bus terminus in Muirhouse, and ongoing problems of damage to locks as seen at existing gate to Millenium Park
- Need to confirm how many youths from Muirhouse actually are causing problems in Silverknowes – to date 4 have been identified following Police interventions, along with youths from elsewhere in the city
- Desire for analysis of the evidence base prior to decisions being made, looking at ASB and vandalism statistics, whether evidence exists that blocking off the route would resolve or mitigate issues and further assessments of the use of the route.

Actions

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| 1. Survey use of walkways | PS/NH |
| 2. Survey residents in Silverknowes and Muirhouse to establish views on closing off walkways, either with fixed barrier or gated access | PS/NH |
| 3. Share conclusions of Police crime prevention survey | Inspector Cooper |
| 4. Police crime statistics – comparison of Silverknowes with Muirhouse and other areas | Inspectors Cooper & Davis |
| 5. Establish home address of youths identified by Police | Inspectors Cooper & Davis |
| 6. Establish efficacy of gates/blocked access in other locations | PD/AMcB |
| 7. Clarify process/timescales for closing walkways | AMcB |
| 8. Establish costs/effects of CCTV interventions | FMcC |
| 9. Consider opportunities for diversionary activity/youth work | PS |
| 10. Consult Forth youth forum/school pupil councils/youth workers | PS/NH |

Reconvene early February to update on actions and consider next steps.

Comments regarding content of the minutes of the meeting by Rod Alexander, Chair, DMSA who attended the meeting.

I would wish to make the following comments about the note of the meeting. I have concerns about two particular points.

1. The minutes fall well short of adequately describing the seriousness of the vandalism in Silverknowes.

For example, it is merely minuted that there had been a spate of stone throwing at windows while it is not recorded that over one week-end fourteen windows were broken.

As another example, it is minuted that a gang of youths had marched down Silverknowes Eastway while there is no mention of the serious vandalism in damage to cars and property that they were perpetrating.

There was much discussion at the meeting about how serious the situation had been ,to the extent that the residents had been driven to despair.

It is important that this is properly recorded. This was much worse than just stone throwing and marching youths.

2. The other matter that which concerns me is around the reference in the Minutes to the fact that " there is a desire for evidence that blocking off the route would resolve or mitigate issues ... ".

I accept there may well be a need for more evidence but there was much discussion around the fact that the high visibility police presence over the previous six weeks to discourage trouble had been successful in resulting in a sharp reduction in incidents.

This was recognised by the Chair as providing evidence that restricting access from Muirhouse would have a positive effect and the point was specifically included in his summing up.

The failure to record this is a significant omission from the Minutes and needs to be recognised.

Rod Alexander

Chair

DMSA