

**COUNCIL SEMINAR
Friday, 27th May, 2016**

Present:- Councillor Lelliott (in the Chair); Councillors Alam, Allcock, Allen, Atkin, Beaumont, Clark, Cooksey, Cowles, Cusworth, Elliot, Fenwick-Green, Jones, Khan, Marles, McNeely, Reeder, Rose, Rushforth, Sansome, Simpson and Walsh.

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Andrews, Elliott, Elliott, Hague, Hoddinott, Jarvis, Jepson, Roche, Roddison, Senior, Sheppard, Short, Tweed and Watson.

PROTESTS.

Councillor Lelliott, Cabinet Member for Jobs and the Local Economy, welcomed Elected Members and Officers in attendance and thanked all for attending.

The Officers in attendance: -

Karen Hanson, Assistant Director, Community Safety and Street Scene;
Damien Wilson, Strategic Director, Regeneration and Environment;
Police Officer Phil Reeves, Tactical Adviser;
Chief Inspector Ian Charlton;
Superintendent Jason Harwin;
Waheed Akhtar, Voluntary Sector Liaison Manager;
Mandy Atkinson, Communications Officer;
Tracy Holmes, Communications Manager.

A brief update was provided to the Elected Members in attendance in relation to a protest planned in Rotherham Town Centre on 4th June, 2016.

- Numbers in attendance on behalf of Pegida was expected to be around 300;
- Pegida was known to be a well-ordered, low-risk group;
- It was possible members of other Right Wing groups could attend to join;
- A counter demonstration of Unite Against Fascism was expected in the number of 500 people;
- Representatives of the Rotherham Defence Campaign may also be represented;
- The march was planned for two days prior to the expected start date of Ramadan;
- Pegida's route was still subject to negotiation/confirmation and would consist of a 'silent walk';
- Unite Against Fascism had requested to follow Pegida's route;
- It was likely that some barriers would be in place;
- It was important to protect all groups' right to Free Speech;

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- South Yorkshire Police were able to police this event within their existing resources. The required threshold whereby they could ask the Home Secretary to consider banning the event had not been met. The Home Secretary's powers only extended as far as being able to ban a march. She was not able to ban/prohibit assemblies.

Questions followed the information presentation, and the following were raised: -

Councillor Khan had met with Muslim Youth and they had reported some outstanding issues to him. What lessons would be learned from previous experiences to improve outcomes? Would CCTV be deployed, along with additional policing capacity?

Answer: - CCTV would be used to support the police operation on the day. Protest Liaison Teams will be on the ground, although the dialogue with the groups started weeks ago. South Yorkshire Police's aim would be to protect people and property. Protest group representatives would be asked to point out the agitators on the day to mitigate the risks. Case law around containment - Sections 12 and 14 – met criteria to have defined areas for any assembly.

Councillor Khan asked whether there was a role for Councillors within this?

This would be considered at a Ward level.

Councillor McNeely asked about All Saints' Square and the assembly points and timings. Would there be barriers put up to protect members of the public to going about their private business?

Answer: - South Yorkshire Police were working with the protest groups and had given them a deadline to determine and notify their route. If they did not respond to this within deadline their route would be determined.

Work would be undertaken to minimise the use of barriers wherever possible.

Councillor Alam was concerned about the disruption to the general public and businesses. Businesses will be impacted on one of their busiest days of the week. Could Section 12 be used to arrange marches elsewhere. He agreed and supported individuals'/groups' right to march, but not with the current disruption experienced.

Answer: - It was agreed that marches happening regularly compounded the impact on business and town centre users month after month. Changes could only happen if legislation was altered.

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Councillor Sansome asked when is 'Enough Enough'? Continued marches would lose the town centre shoppers, which will cause businesses to lose money. Who pays this back?

Karen Hanson confirmed that early discussions with town centre businesses and users had taken place. The Council had asked for accounts of the marches' impacts and these would be recorded to build an evidence base.

Councillor Keenan referred to businesses that had failed due to the protest marches. She reported an example of hearing the Police stigmatising a group of protestors.

Jason Harwin said that this was not acceptable and asked for the incident to be reported. A policing aspiration would be to have only SY Police in attendance at marches, unfortunately there was not enough staff so Officers from other areas were drafted in. They were trained and many had been to previous marches and knew the area. Additional Officers being rota'd on prevented them from doing other things. The impact on staff was cancelled days off and a knock-on to their day jobs.

Councillor Jones was aware that the relevant Acts allowed local authorities to determine where marches and speeches took place. He was concerned about the potential for the protests to be hijacked by individuals not associated with the main groups. The marches were having a massive financial impact on town centre businesses. Trading could be changed to a Sunday as a way of minimising their losses as a result of Saturday marches.

Jason Harwin confirmed that Pegida had been fully compliant with any direction given by the Police. Some groups did come to fight and they had been prevented and the Police could take action when criminal offences were committed. Impact on businesses and shoppers happened regardless of where the protestors were. The Police would try and restrict against the un-proportionality of intent. It would be necessary to lobby MPs to get legislation on changing trading hours.

Councillor Alam asked if lessons had been learned from Birmingham's experiences of directing protestors away from the main retail areas.

Answer: - Birmingham's protest group/s had asked for the outskirts by choice.

Councillor Sansome asked whether this event could be hijacked by other Far Right Groups?

Jason Harwin confirmed that other groups were holding protests on the same day in other areas of the country, which could reduce this possibility.

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Councillor Lelliott thanked all for attending and the informative presentation and discussion. She asked Members to get in touch with Damien Wilson and Karen Hanson if they wished to make any accounts relating to past marches' impact on Rotherham. These would constitute the evidence base for submission to the Home Secretary.

Agreed: - That the information shared be noted.