

WAVENEY DISTRICT FORUM

The Forum was held at the Wherry Hotel, Bridge Street, Oulton Broad on Wednesday, 25 September 2013 at 6.30 pm.

PRESENT:

Office of the Police & Crime Commissioner

Sandra Graffham (Communications Manager), Sarah McNulty (Business Co-ordinator), Tim Passmore (Police & Crime Commissioner) and Ian Rands (Business Manager).

Suffolk Constabulary

Superintendent Phil Aves (Strategic Policing Commander – East) and Douglas Paxton (Chief Constable).

Also in attendance : Inspector Nick Aitken (Local Policing Commander – Beccles and Leiston), Chief Inspector Paul Bradford (Deputy Strategic Policing Commander), and Inspector Stuart Grimsey (Local Policing Commander – Lowestoft South).

1. POLICE & CRIME COMMISSIONER OVERVIEW

- 1.1 The PCC welcomed over 60 members of the public to the meeting and made introductions. He was pleased that three members of the Waveney Cadets were in attendance and had helped support the evening. A copy of his slides will be attached to these notes for the record.

2. POLICING UPDATE

- 2.1 Following an overview of the position across the county from the Chief Constable, Superintendent Phil Aves gave a presentation on policing in the Waveney area and a copy of his slides will also be attached for the record.

3. QUESTIONS/COMMENTS FROM THE FLOOR

- 3.1 *Concern was expressed over the behaviour of young people in the Brittain Centre in the evenings and how older people felt intimidated. This had led to people taking taxis home after the theatre to avoid walking through the Centre.*

The PCC was concerned that everyone should show respect for each other and that you could not leave it to the police to address all such issues. Superintendent Aves added that there was CCTV coverage and that his officers did engage with the youngsters who were generally bored and had nowhere else to go. He did not believe that they caused a lot of problems.

- 3.2 *A plea was made by David Willis on behalf of Lowestoft Town Pastors for financial support towards a CCTV system in the area of Oulton Broad which was impacted by the night-time economy. They had a positive impact in Lowestoft itself but could not extend their work unless CCTV was in existence.*

The PCC made it clear that he did not have limitless funding to support local projects such as this, but suggested that if a costed proposal with supporting evidence was developed he would certainly look at it.

- 3.3 *A Neighbourhood Watch Co-ordinator questioned why PCCs had been introduced and asked what difference they had made.*

In response to concerns over cost, the PCC said that savings in the region of £100k could be proved when compared to the costs of the former Police Authority. He described his role as a critical friend to the Constabulary and how he had greater freedom to make a difference, including both nationally and in terms of representing local interests. As mentioned in his introduction he was a fervent supporter of Suffolk and doing his best to ensure the public sector worked better together.

- 3.4 *A member of the audience (David Webb) described his background in emergency planning and his links to MI5 and other bodies such as Raynet. He offered his services to help whenever needed.*

He was thanked for his interest.

- 3.5 *Penny Forest of Bridge Road, Oulton Broad described how her Bed & Breakfast business had suffered as a result of ASB linked to a nightclub opposite which was licenced for 700 people. She said she had been making representations over a period of 4/5 years and there was little improvement. Support for her views was signified by others in the audience.*

The PCC said that from his perspective he was trying to promote closer working with the local authorities as the licensing body; he was hoping to convene a 'mini conference'.

The Chief Constable and Superintendent Aves were both familiar with her concerns. Policing this area formed part of the night-time economy plan and included covert visits to the premises. The evidence suggested that the club was well run and the main concerns linked to when revellers left the premises to make their way home. Officers did take action when the behaviour warranted it.

Penny Forest said that in her view such a premises should not have received a licence given the residential nature of the area and also added that Environmental Health would not respond to the issue of noisy people in the streets only the level of music. The PCC said that he would make enquiries.

Mr Willis said that this was strong evidence for the installation of CCTV.

- 3.6 *Mr Sivyer of the Neighbourhood Watch Association said that there were instances of minor criminal damage further away from Bridge Road as people went home. He also spoke about being sceptical of the role of the PCC when it was introduced but had since been impressed with what he had seen, particularly in promoting easier access to the police.*

He was thanked for his remarks.

- 3.7 *A Magistrate said that in his experience far more people came before the Bench on charges related to drinking in the past than they did currently and he was concerned that police officers stood back and were reluctant to take positive action.*

This was refuted by the Chief Constable who referred to the ability to dispense fines quickly. He gave an assurance that officers were instructed to take a firm stance if the circumstances warranted. The PCC was concerned as to a lack of respect and moral standing and hoped that over time attitudes could be changed.

- 3.8 *Arising from the presentation the PCC was asked why there was a different approach to the use of reserves as compared to the former Police Authority?*

The PCC said that decision-making was simpler and the facts were that the level reserves were sufficient to support the recruitment initiative mentioned.

- 3.9 *A representative of Neighbourhood Watch had seen reference in the media to possible privatisation of the Probation Service and asked whether other public services might follow including the police.*

- 3.10 The PCC was adamant that he would protect current policing services but recognised the need to work closely with partners to provide value for money. He understood the Probation Service was reviewing a possible Social Enterprise approach.

- 3.11 *Concern was expressed that cancellation of the Lowestoft Carnival was linked to a lack of support from the local police.*

Superintendent Aves said that his officers had worked hard with the organisers of the event to resolve the policing support issues. As it happened, there were insufficient floats to ensure the event was viable. The PCC said that it appeared to him there had been a breakdown in communications with the public.

- 3.12 *Former MP, Bob Blizzard posed two questions:*

- (i) As regards street drinkers in the Station Square area, the police had the power to confiscate goods but could they move individuals away?

Superintendent Aves confirmed that the police did have such powers. On some occasions the street drinkers were on British Rail land and any action then fell to the BTP.

While the PCC continued to support the imposition of minimum prices for alcohol, he was now also promoting the removal of the cheap/strong varieties from the shelves.

- (ii) Why were detainees now taken to Gorleston involving time consuming journeys rather than using Lowestoft Police Station?

The PCC said that the decision to provide new Police Investigation Centres jointly with Norfolk under a Private Finance Initiative was taken before he was elected. He acknowledged that the facilities that existed in police stations were not fit for purpose, although he had some concerns over the cost.

Superintendent Aves said that they had become much smarter in their use of the PIC at Gorleston and his officers were coping with the demands. He highlighted the excellent facilities at the six PICs built across Norfolk & Suffolk which had received praise nationally.

- 3.13 *A District Councillor highlighted what they saw as the growing importance of police input in schools and wondered if additional resources could be made available?*

The PCC acknowledged the point being made hoping that more formal arrangements could be developed. He also referred to the need to raise the awareness of parents to issues affecting their children. Superintendent Aves added that PCSOs tried hard to develop close working arrangements with schools and there were also successful events such as 'Crucial Crew' which raised the profile of the emergency services.

- 3.14 *Given the earlier discussions, a plea was made to press for changes in the licencing laws and remove access to alcohol.*

The Chief Constable said that a new multi-agency Alcohol Strategy for Suffolk had recently been published in recognition of the damage to society it can cause. The PCC confirmed that Community Safety Partnerships and other agencies had this issue high on their agenda.

- 3.15 *Linked to the theme of parental guidance, a person expressed his disappointment over the attitude of many young people to littering.*

The PCC agreed with the point being made, highlighting the cost to public bodies in collecting litter.

- 3.16 *Concern was expressed over the number of people still not wearing a seat belt or using a mobile phone whilst driving.*

The PCC referred to a recent event he had attended where Roads Policing officers were checking on lorry drivers and there were a number showing a blatant disregard for the law. The Chief Constable said that this issue had been raised in a number of public engagement activities and he hoped that some resources could be released to instigate a campaign later in the Autumn.

- 3.17 *A representative of the Lowestoft Pastors made the point that there was a clear distinction between hard line drinking as viewed in the street and binge drinking associated with the night-time economy.*

The Chief Constable and Superintendent Aves re-iterated that officers would not hold back if the circumstances observed warranted the issue of a FPT. Officers were regularly briefed on this prior to going out on patrol.

- 3.18 *A person asked whether the PCC felt that the Courts were failing the police because of an over lenient approach.*

The PCC said that such issues were discussed at the Local Criminal Justice Board while he had also taken the opportunity to raise sentencing nationally together with the thresholds adopted by the CPS.

- 3.19 *A representative of Neighbourhood Watch thanked the PCC for his support for their work. As to the issues in Oulton Broad, he supported the re-introduction of the SOS Bus to help relieve pressure on the police.*

The PCC thanked him and said he would review any case made for an SOS Bus.

4. QUESTIONS POSED TO THE AUDIENCE

- 4.1 A technical problem with the interactive voting equipment meant that a series of questions were posed and the audience responded by a show of hands. The results are set out below:

Do you think the police are dealing with the things that matter in your community – **38**

Do you feel the level of ASB and crime has increased in the last 2 years - **28**

Do you feel safe in the area where you live - **55**

If you have been a victim of ASB or crime did you report it – **22 had been a victim – 1 had not reported it**

Do you think the police provide value for money in your area – **44.**

[At this point there were approximately 60 people in the audience.]

The PCC thanked everyone for attending and closed the meeting at 8.07 pm.