

SUFFOLK COASTAL DISTRICT FORUM

The Forum was held at The Marlborough Hotel, Felixstowe on Wednesday, 9 October 2013 at 6.30 pm.

PRESENT:

Office of the Police & Crime Commissioner

Melissa Bryan (PA to the Police and Crime Commissioner), Sandra Graffham (Communications Manager), Sarah McNulty (Business Co-ordinator) and Tim Passmore (Police & Crime Commissioner).

Suffolk Constabulary

Inspector Matt Dee (Local Policing Commander – Felixstowe and Woodbridge), Douglas Paxton (Chief Constable) and Acting Sergeant Paul Smith (Felixstowe and District Safer Neighbourhood Team).

1. POLICE & CRIME COMMISSIONER OVERVIEW

- 1.1 The PCC welcomed over 35 members of the public to the meeting and made introductions. He was pleased that three members of the Martlesham 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, Inspector Matt Dee gave a presentation on policing in the Woodbridge and Felixstowe area and local priorities; a copy of those slides will also be attached for the record.

3. QUESTIONS/COMMENTS FROM THE FLOOR

- 3.1 *A local councillor referred firstly to procurement and reports that some forces pay double what others pay; he looked for reassurance that Suffolk was in the lower range. The second point related to a general lack of feedback on progression of reported crime.*
- 3.2 Tim Passmore said the he was working with the Constabulary to review procurement and felt that more could be done to improve the position, including work with partners. One of the main frustrations centred around the inflexibility of some national framework agreements.
- 3.3 Matt Dee responded regarding the lack of feedback and said that a service level agreement should be made with victims at the time of reporting a crime and from the outset such agreement should include the best means of contact for officers to update the victim on the case.

- 3.4 Tim Passmore advised that the Constabulary surveyed victims and asked them if they had been kept informed. It was acknowledged that in some cases people provided information to the police but when they were not the actual victims themselves then feedback might not be provided. It was noted that services such as CrimeStoppers were good at providing feedback.
- 3.5 *A member of the Bent Hill and Seafront Residents Association said that they felt they had received poor service from the police in the past and very much hoped to see improvements in the future. He said that the police had a 'non-confrontational' policing policy and even when alerted to crimes they would make comments about things not being on their 'patch' and appeared to stay only in the location in which they had been assigned. He said that instances of alerting police officers to people having sex on the beach, having fights or dropping litter had all been ignored. It was suggested that the body worn cameras were little help as officers often saw what was going on but what residents actually wanted was to see some action being taken.*
- 3.6 Matt Dee gave an assurance that the night time economy was a Safer Neighbourhood Team priority, that there were dedicated patrols for Friday and Saturday nights and people were dealt with and arrested as appropriate. He said that legislation under Section 27 of the Violent Crime Reduction Act provided the police with powers to order intoxicated individuals to leave a location, they could also specify the route to be taken and order them not to return to the area for a specified period of time. Matt Dee advised that as well as local resources, the Constabulary's night time economy team were also deployed where necessary, particularly if issues became apparent via CCTV. Both covert and overt visits to pubs and clubs were also carried out, some of which members of the public would not be aware of. He urged members of the public to keep reporting. Douglas Paxton said that he would expect officers to be tackling issues alerted to them and would be very disappointed if it was the case that no action had been taken.
- 3.7 ION Track Drug Detector devices were also used and if people were found to have had any contact with controlled substances they were generally excluded from pubs and clubs, even if the result of a search for possession at the time was negative.
- 3.8 Tim Passmore advised that there was an increasing number of individuals with drug addiction being held in the Police Investigation Centres and procedures for drug testing on arrest were now in place. A robust approach was being taken and in some cases the courts required individuals to undertake courses to 'clean up'. It was acknowledged that education in schools was an important aspect in tackling the issue in the longer term.
- 3.9 *A new resident of the area raised his concerns about speeding in the Playford area which he stated had been a problem for some time. Whilst he acknowledged that car designs were more advanced they were still driven by people and mistakes could still be made. He said that in the past officers had tested speeding in the area but were restricted by the width of the road as to the position in which the test could be undertaken and therefore the main problems did not become evident.*
- 3.10 Tim Passmore advised that he had received more correspondence regarding speeding than any other issues and acknowledged that it was a county wide concern. He said that following a survey carried out in June, to which there had been approximately 2,000 responses, the Chief Constable and his team were working on a report to address the findings from a police perspective. The Suffolk Roadsafe Partnership would also be considering the findings in due course. Consideration was being given to the most appropriate locations for the deployment of the mobile speed cameras and other resources. It was also acknowledged that there was more that needed to be done to educate people to drive more carefully. Douglas Paxton said that the issue of speeding and concerns about people driving whilst using mobile phones had also been

raised with him at his recent 'Road show' events around the county. He said that the Constabulary would be striving to cover the areas which posed the most significant threats to the community.

- 3.11 Matt Dee assured attendees that speeding had been a Safer Neighbourhood Team priority in the past in many areas and recent work at the 33 main sites in the district had resulted in 105 motorists being caught travelling at excess speeds.
- 3.12 *A further concern on this topic was that the officer attending the bi-monthly parish council meeting did not always come with the statistics about the recent speed checks, stating that the data was available on-line. It was felt that it was basic information the officer should come with and it was not helpful to refer to the website as not everyone had access to the internet.*
- 3.13 Matt Dee said he would pass on that message and ask that the data be made available at the meetings in future.
- 3.14 *A question was raised about what objectives were set for licensees and how they were measured. It was suggested that the proactive work at the weekend had only happened because of the forthcoming public meeting.*
- 3.15 Tim Passmore reminded attendees that licenses and associated conditions were granted by Local Authorities not by the police. It was acknowledged that whilst many premises were getting involved in initiatives such as the 'Best Bar None' scheme and demonstrating that they were well run venues, there was little that licensees could actually do to control the behaviour of individuals once they leave the premises.
- 3.16 Early morning alcohol restriction orders and the impact, on society and the economy, of extending licensing hours from 11pm until the early hours, were discussed. An assurance was given that the work at the weekend related to the deployment of a specialist team and the timing had no relevance to the public meeting.
- 3.17 Douglas Paxton spoke of his leadership style and said that over the next five years he would be keen to focus on those issues that matter the most to the public, so he welcomed the views provided.
- 3.18 A member of the Suffolk Coastal District Council Licensing Committee said that it was helpful when the police were in attendance at Committee meetings and provided their views.
- 3.19 *There was a view that more could be done to publish the results of police activity which would help to improve public confidence. It was felt that a 'softly softly' approach was being taken and there was a reluctance to take people into custody.*
- 3.20 Douglas Paxton said that he had taken those comments on board and he would raise them with the Communications team. He acknowledged that there was always room for improvement.
- 3.21 *A question was posed related to a strategy implemented a number of years ago whereby the local policing bases were reviewed and policing for Felixstowe was managed from Woodbridge. The question was whether that had worked and whether the moves had resulted in the financial savings expected?*
- 3.22 Douglas Paxton explained that the decision had been taken before he was in post and action had been taken to reverse that decision which had meant that Felixstowe had regained its response team. It was something that had been trialled but did not prove productive with a number of examples of officers being in the wrong place at the wrong time.

- 3.23 Matt Dee gave an assurance that officers were now based at Woodbridge, Felixstowe and at Police Headquarters in Martlesham which he felt was a positive step in the right direction. He said that work was currently being undertaken to identify a new Safer Neighbourhood Team base in Woodbridge.
- 3.24 There were also some concerns that the Felixstowe Station was open between 9 am and 5 pm - Monday to Friday, but that it was between 12 pm and 4 am that officers were really needed.
- 3.25 Douglas Paxton explained that the footfall of people visiting the station was very low and the emphasis was on getting officers out on patrol rather than sitting in a station.
- 3.26 A member of the Town Pastors said that they saw a dramatic difference when the police hub was moved away from Felixstowe meaning that they had to diffuse more violent incidents whilst waiting for police attendance. He said that the response was much better since the hub had been moved back.
- 3.27 Tim Passmore congratulated the Woodbridge & Felixstowe Town Pastors for recently winning the Suffolk Coastal Community Award for 'Making the Community Safer' and thanked them for their work.
- 3.28 *A question was raised by a local Neighbourhood Watch Co-ordinator, who stated he was a retired police officer, regarding informal community resolutions. He quoted an example of a pedal cycle having been stolen which was found to have a different saddle when recovered. That incident was dealt with by way of Community Resolution and by a detective officer in Leiston. He also asked about the impact of Community Resolutions on the crime figures.*
- 3.29 Douglas Paxton expressed his support for Restorative Justice as opposed to the days of central Government targets for offences brought to justice. Restorative Justice was more proportionate allowing officers to use their professional judgement and creativity in dealing with individual cases, avoiding unnecessary criminalisation and giving some people a second chance, in many cases young people. It was pointed out that the person that stole the bicycle was had been caught on CCTV and was not a young person.
- 3.30 Douglas Paxton said that crime figures still reflected the level of criminality regardless of the 'detection rates' and disposal methods. It was however recognised that there was a need to be more transparent about the use of Restorative Justice and discussions were taking place with magistrates about the possibility of setting up Independent Scrutiny Panels to review the outcomes of such cases.
- 3.31 *The licensee of The Grand in Felixstowe invited members of the Bent Hill and Seafront Residents Association to attend one of the Nightsafe meetings to see what the police and licensees are collectively doing to tackle some of the issues raised.*
- 3.32 *A resident from Wolsey Gardens said that young people regularly gathered at 3:30 am in the gardens and make lots of noise. When he had contacted the Police via the control room in the past the operator had advised that they would send someone if they could but was often told what a busy night it had been. He said it should be regarded as Anti-Social Behaviour and reflected a need for more officers at night.*
- 3.33 Tim Passmore said that there was no freeze on recruitment of police officers and more Police Community Support Officer resources and Special Constabulary officers were also being enlisted.

- 3.34 Douglas Paxton advised that the Constabulary was continually trying to match resources to demand but sometimes when large scale incidents occurred resources had to be moved around the county. Matt Dee said that he was looking to increase the number of officers policing the night time economy as demand required and plans were in place for policing bank holidays and specific events. At times there had been spikes of demand on Sunday evenings in the seaside towns and a need to bolster resources from other areas of the county.
- 3.35 *A member of Felixstowe Town Council said that the council had worked hard to get CCTV systems in place and she was disappointed to hear that the Chamber of Trade had indicated that they would no longer contribute to the maintenance costs. She said that she felt it would be a great loss if there was any reduction and asked for some re-assurance that it helped to keep crime down in the town centre.*
- 3.36 Matt Dee said that the CCTV system was vital and enabled key evidence to be recorded. It was noted that the CCTV volunteers were based at the Felixstowe Police Station and their work in monitoring where things were happening was crucial to the effective deployment of officers and in many cases enabled early intervention to prevent incidents. The representative of the Town Pastors spoke in support of that stance confirming that when the volunteers were in place the information provided was extremely useful and helped with the allocation of resources.
- 3.37 *A local business owner asked how the Constabulary determined the level and speed of response to incidents reported to them.*
- 3.38 Douglas Paxton said that the Constabulary was constantly working to try and get the right level of response to individual cases. He explained that staff in the control room had a set of questions by which they could grade the response and improvements in technology were being implemented which would help further improve the means of locating resources for appropriate deployment. He said that there was an Inspector in the control room overseeing that work on a daily basis.
- 3.39 *A Suffolk Coastal District Councillor pointed out that the area was not just about the towns but also rural locations and asked if consideration had been given to introducing a mounted police unit in Suffolk.*
- 3.40 Tim Passmore advised that the matter of mounted police had been discussed but nothing had formally been considered to date. It was acknowledged that rural and wildlife crime was an issue in Suffolk and the Constabulary's introduction of a dedicated rural crime team which included support from the Special Constabulary was mentioned.
- 3.41 *Three further issues raised related to speeding on Sea Road, particularly in the Summer months, trial bikes speeding through the park areas and how well the police had recently dealt with people from the travelling community.*
- 3.42 Tim Passmore acknowledged that dealing with individuals from the travelling communities was a countywide problem and not just about moving people around from one area to another. Matt Dee and Paul Smith said they had noted the issues regarding Sea Road and inconsiderate cyclists.

4. QUESTIONS POSED TO THE AUDIENCE

- 4.1 Questions were posed using the interactive voting equipment and the results will be published with the notes for the record.

The meeting ended at 8:25 pm.