

## **BABERGH PUBLIC MEETING**

A public meeting was held at East Bergholt High School, Heath Road, East on Wednesday, 9 April 2014 at 6.30 pm.

PRESENT:

### **Office of the Police & Crime Commissioner**

Melissa Bryan (Personal Assistant to the PCC), Sandra Graffham (Communications Manager), Christopher Jackson (Chief Executive), Sarah McNulty (Business Co-ordinator) and Tim Passmore (Police & Crime Commissioner).

### **Suffolk Constabulary**

Inspector Paul Crick (Babergh Local Policing Commander), Chief Inspector Andrew Mason (Strategic Policing Command – West) and Douglas Paxton (Chief Constable).

#### **1. POLICE & CRIME COMMISSIONER OVERVIEW**

- 1.1 The PCC welcomed around 40 members of the public to the meeting and made introductions. A copy of the presentation 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 Paul Crick gave a presentation on policing in the Babergh area; a copy of their slides will also be attached for the record.

#### **3. QUESTIONS/COMMENTS FROM THE FLOOR**

##### *Anti-Social Behaviour Officer (ASBO) for Babergh*

- 3.1 A member of the audience said that he had experienced difficulties in contacting the ASBO Officer for Babergh and the return message he had received suggested that he should contact a member staff based in Bury St Edmunds. Having contacted that person they had no knowledge of being assigned as the alternative contact and were unable to assist. The Constabulary Officers present advised that the ASBO post was a local authority position and not a Constabulary post but Inspector Crick agreed to follow-up the point with the individual following the meeting.

##### *Speeding*

- 3.2 During the meeting concerns regarding speeding at various locations were raised. Speeding in Assington, Melford Road, Waldingfield Road, on the B170 Mill Cottage, on the Brantham Straight and at Windy's Corner were all discussed. Attendees were encouraged to keep writing in to the Constabulary with concerns and issues relating to speeding so that they could be addressed. Inspector Crick gave assurance that local officers were in regular contact with Highways Agency about the 86 parishes in Babergh to prioritise actions and enforcement work. It was reported the PCC and Constabulary were also engaged with the Highways Agency regarding county-wide

roads infrastructure issues and their response to incidents. Work also continued with the Suffolk Roadsafe Board to address speeding and roads policing issues.

- 3.3 An attendee stated that support for the Community Speedwatch Scheme at Capel St Mary was inconsistent and said he had raised a number of questions to which he had not received a response. Inspector Crick agreed to follow that point up after the meeting. Reference was also made to a recent newspaper article in the Daily Telegraph regarding Speedwatch in Bentley by a member of the audience. He advised that the results of the Safecam exercise in March showed that the problems were more about substandard junctions rather than speeding. Inspector Crick advised that work was being done to review Community Speedwatch at a county-wide level and consideration was being given to implementing more 'buddy systems' with neighbouring villages so that local volunteers need not fear of criticism when operating in the village in which they lived.

#### *Introduction of PCCs*

- 3.4 The Constabulary officers were asked for their view on the introduction of PCCs and whether the change had been positive. The Chief Constable advised that from his perspective the change from the Police Authority to the PCC had been positive in that it had aided agility in the relationship and enabled more timely decision making rather than having to wait for formal meetings.
- 3.5 Chief Inspector Andrew Mason supported the Chief Constable's stance and said that the introduction of the PCC had enabled quicker decision making which was beneficial for managers. There was also better visibility in terms of the PCC role and his efforts to visit various locations around the Force to meet staff had been well received. It was also felt positive that officers had been encouraged to raise issues if necessary and suggestions for improvements were welcomed.

#### *Workforce Mix*

- 3.6 A query was raised regarding diversity of staff in the PCC team and in the Constabulary. The PCC advised that seven out of his nine staff were female. The Chief Constable advised that overall aim was to make the Constabulary staff reflective of the community. Both the PCC and Chief Constable acknowledged that more work was needed to address the position. It was reported that the Constabulary was continuously making efforts to improve engagement in schools and to positively promote policing and support roles, a Positive Action Recruitment Officer had recently been employed, and the PCC received regular reports to his Accountability and Performance Panel on the Constabulary's workforce mix to monitor the position.
- 3.7 The Chief Constable advised that a female member of staff was the Chair of the national Black Police Association which was very positive and helped the Constabulary in providing advice, suggestions for improvements and constructive criticism. It was noted that the Constabulary had no officer above the rank of Sergeant from the Black and Minority Ethnic community at present. It was hoped that the plans for a more direct entry scheme, allowing individuals to progress to the rank of Inspector within 2-3 years, would make policing a more attractive career option and address that position.

#### *Estates and Response*

- 3.8 A question was raised regarding whether there were any plans to re-open the Capel St Mary police station. Attendees were advised that the front desk at Capel is open three times a week: Monday, Wednesday and Friday between 10 am and midday. Public accessibility, officer locations and response hubs were all discussed and attendees were assured that the Constabulary continued to demonstrate positive performance regarding response times and that was closely monitored.

#### *Procurement*

- 3.9 A number of points were raised regarding procurement, building construction and supporting local business. The PCC said that he was sometimes frustrated by the

restrictions of the various procurement frameworks agreements applicable to the Constabulary and that he was keen to support UK and local trade wherever possible. He advised that he had recently met with the Confederation of British Industry in London to consider what more could be done to support local industry.

- 3.10 The Chief Constable spoke of his responsibilities in ensuring appropriate procurement, particularly in terms of providing safe vehicles, armoury/weapons and equipment for staff. It was acknowledged that some of the police specific requirements reduced the number of manufacturers willing to produce the items required. Discussions on this issue were on-going.

#### *Crime Statistics*

- 3.11 A question was raised regarding the crime figures and the Chief Constable confirmed that the data quoted was in comparison with the previous three year average. Statistics were reported in that way to reflect trends in crime rather than tackling short term peaks or changes and enabled resources to be deployed in a more effective and planned way. He acknowledged that there was still underreporting of some crimes as reflected by the British Crime Survey which indicated that approximately 50% of offences were reported nationally. Both the both the PCC and Constabulary were continually working to increase public confidence in reporting.

- 3.12 The Chief Constable said that he was particularly striving to tackle areas of most significant impact such as serious sexual offences, domestic abuse and hate crime so recognised that an increase in the number of offences was a positive indication of improved confidence in reporting. Reducing the number of repeat offences was also a high priority for the Constabulary.

- 3.13 Corruption within the Constabulary was discussed and the audience assured that there were no significant issues in Suffolk. The PCC advised that there was a joint PCC and Constabulary Audit Committee overseeing that suitable controls and management procedures were in place. The Chief Constable advised that an anti-corruption unit was in existence as part of the Norfolk and Suffolk Professional Standards Department and proportionate measures for monitoring staff and ICT systems were in place. In some cases data protection issues had arisen regarding the disclosure of information or inappropriate use of ICT systems so staff were regularly reminded of their responsibilities in handling confidential data.

#### *Police officers in schools*

- 3.14 A member of the audience from Essex highlighted the advantages of positive police engagement in schools and the impact it had on improving the confidence of young people in raising issues or concerns. He gave a specific example of a case and asked what the position was in Suffolk. The Chief Constable advised that there was a teacher from the school venue in audience and he had discussed police engagement prior to the start of the meeting which confirmed there was a good relationship locally. The PCC and Chief Constable recognised the benefits of positive engagement with young people at an early age.

#### *Police Helicopter*

- 3.15 Concerns were raised about the costs of the Police Helicopter. Attendees were advised that the Constabulary received air support as part of a National Police Air Support agreement. Suffolk signed up to the shared resource agreement on the basis of a projected number of hours reflecting the number used previously. In 2013/14 Suffolk had not utilised that provision despite an arrangement with the Norfolk Constabulary to utilise some of the Suffolk hours (as they had required more than projected). As a result Suffolk was considering applying to reduce the number of hours allocated in order to pay only for the percentage of hours actually used in future. Discussions on that matter were on-going and both the PCC and Chief Constable were keen to address the issue.

*Street Watch and Safer Neighbourhood Team Websites*

- 3.16 Concerns were raised regarding funding for Street Watch and Safer Neighbourhood Team websites. The PCC and Chief Constable asked that the details be put in writing so they could consider the issues raised.

*Contact and Control Room and Shared Service Partnership*

- 3.17 It was recognised that a number of people had attended the meeting to discuss the proposals to combine the Norfolk and Suffolk Contract and Control Rooms (CCR) at the Norfolk Headquarters location and implement the Shared Services Partnership (SSP) functions in Suffolk.
- 3.18 The PCC advised that he was seeking public views and had an on-line survey on his website which had received 1600 responses, 20% of which suggested going ahead with the proposals but most indicating that they disagreed. A number of petitions were also in existence. A short paper survey was distributed to attendees at the meeting.
- 3.19 The audience raised a number of points and concerns which were discussed. It was acknowledged that East Bergholt was located closer to Essex rather than Norfolk so a query was raised about whether links were also being considered with other counties. Concerns were also raised about the degree to which local knowledge impacted on the service provided, particularly given many residents in East Bergholt had Colchester postcodes and there were many examples on villages with the same names in multiple areas/counties. The capability in terms of technology in recognising those complexities was also queried. There was a view that the biggest loss would be to Suffolk's identity as the public would view it as more services going to Norfolk.
- 3.20 The Chief Constable explained his rationale for presenting the business cases which formed part of a package of wider proposals. He advised that Norfolk Constabulary had the estate in place for the CCR function and gave assurance that Suffolk would retain an employment base in back office functions such as ICT, Human Resources and Finance so there were options for the re-deployment of staff. He said that there was a need to make savings of £16m by 2017 which was the equivalent of 300 officers. In his professional view the technology and software base was in place to overcome the location/knowledge issues raised and staff, even if based in Norfolk, would be provided with experience of the local area by going out with officers.
- 3.21 The PCC said that he was looking at the alternative options but in order to make the savings required would need to make some changes. He was keen that consideration be given to how savings could be delivered through a zero based budgeting approach linked also with an Estates and ICT review. Other options in terms of partnership working also needed to be considered.
- 3.22 The PCC explained that he had asked for robust business cases and a full costed plan to be provided and made available to the public, not to delay matters, but to ensure proper consideration could be given to the proposals. He also felt that the discussions needed to be held in an open and transparent way. He acknowledged the need to preserve front line policing, maintain levels of service and improve the use of technology.
- 3.23 The PCC was asked if consideration had been given to increasing council tax to keep the control room. He advised that he would consider that option if necessary but he would need to be confident in explaining that position to the taxpayers having considered the other options in the first instance.
- 3.24 It was noted that further consideration would be given to the proposals at the Norfolk and Suffolk Collaboration Panel meeting in Norfolk on Tuesday 30 April 2014.

The PCC thanked everyone for attending and closed the meeting at 8.42 pm.