

ST EDMUNDSBURY PUBLIC MEETING

A public meeting was held at Samuel Ward Academy, Haverhill on Wednesday, 7 May 2014 at 6.30 pm.

PRESENT:

Office of the Police & Crime Commissioner

Tracey Barker (Communications and Support Services Officer), Sandra Graffham (Communications Manager), Tim Passmore (Police & Crime Commissioner) and Vanessa Scott (Policy Officer).

Suffolk Constabulary

Superintendent Terry Byford (Strategic Policing Commander West), Inspector Peter Ferrie (Haverhill Local Policing Commander) and Douglas Paxton (Chief Constable).

1. POLICE & CRIME COMMISSIONER OVERVIEW

- 1.1 The PCC welcomed around 25 members of the public to the meeting and made introductions. The PCC gave a presentation on the key elements of his role and action taken over the past year. 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 Peter Ferrie gave a presentation on policing in the Haverhill area; a copy of their slides will also be attached for the record.

3. QUESTIONS/COMMENTS FROM THE FLOOR

Street Lighting & Crime

Q: Do you feel that the streetlights being turned off from midnight has made a difference to the levels of ASB and criminal offences?

- 3.1 Inspector Ferrie advised that most burglaries occur in the daytime, so the streetlights would have little impact. There was a spate of creeper night-time burglaries but the criminal had been convicted and jailed.
- 3.2 In relation to ASB he confirmed that overall rates had come down and there had been no increases in youth related crime. However the majority of burglaries are facilitated by people not securing their property properly, for example, leaving doors and windows open. His key message to prevent burglary was to secure and protect property. Overall he felt that streetlights being switched off had not impacted on levels of burglary and ASB.

Compliments for Inspector Peter Ferrie and the Haverhill team

- 3.3 There were a number of positive comments about the effectiveness and attitude of the policing team in Haverhill.

Parking/Traffic Issues

Q: While the policing team in Haverhill are doing a great job, the town needs a traffic warden as a deterrent to deal with its serious traffic and parking issues.

- 3.4 A large proportion of the meeting was taken up with concerns about parking in the town centre. There were a number of representations by members of the public that a traffic warden was needed to resolve the parking problems. There was a request that the Constabulary and PCC put pressure on the County Council to deal with the matter.
- 3.5 Chief Constable Paxton advised that parking, speeding and anti-social driving were public concerns wherever he went in the county. He reassured the audience that the roads policing team ensure their enforcement activity reflects areas of public concern.
- 3.6 Inspector Ferrie understood people's frustrations with the parking situation but felt there was scope to work together in partnership to provide some solution. There had been proposals by the County Council about engineering solutions to restrict access and so prevent parking, however wider consultation had thrown up concerns and the plans for a one-way system had been dropped.
- 3.7 He advised that over 400 tickets had been issued in a 3 month period but this had not sufficiently acted as a deterrent with some people prepared to pay a parking fine. However the Constabulary and Suffolk County Council were considering the option of a match funded PCSO who could focus on the town centre (and specifically dedicate time to parking issues). This he felt was a way of both organisations providing a resource to support resolution of the parking issues.
- 3.8 Tim Passmore wholly supported a partnership approach to this matter and advised that he regularly meets with Cllr Graham Newman and other partners at the Suffolk Roadsafe Board and, if necessary, could take these matters up with Cllr Newman directly.

Recruitment processes

Q: Why was the recruitment process stopped?

- 3.9 There were a couple of concerns expressed about the Constabulary's recruitment processes both to become and officer and for transferring officers. An example was given of an applicant who had been through the Constabulary's recruitment process only to be told, late on in the process, that recruitment was no longer taking place.
- 3.10 The Chief Constable explained that the Constabulary was resourced based on a funded establishment of police officers and PCSOs. The profile of the workforce is constantly monitored to ensure it is in line with the required establishment. When the workforce is above the agreed establishment it is necessary to freeze recruitment until a further intake of new recruits is needed. The audience was assured that those who have met the selection criteria are kept on file, but he understood that it was frustrating for applicants when the recruitment process had to be stopped.

Police Helicopter

Q: Why don't we see the police helicopter any more?

- 3.11 The PCC advised there was a new national air police service, he recognised the sense of sharing such specialist assets with other forces. He needed to ensure it was a cost-effective option for Suffolk and that the force was charged for what it used.
- 3.12 The Chief Constable advised that the national service was the best way to make effective use of an expensive asset. West Yorkshire Police own the national structure. The national air service still provides Suffolk Constabulary with the use of a fantastic asset for finding lost people or providing strategic oversight in relation to major operations and public order. He advised that while people might not see a helicopter as much the audience could rest assured the police would still use the resource for incidents where it was required.

Training & Development

Q: Do officers have a sufficient understanding of autism and how to work with people with autism or is there a training need?

- 3.13 The questioner felt that an understanding by officers of how a person with autism might react to being approached or touched, or their discomfort with making direct eye contact, would really help officers to provide a sensitive response.
- 3.14 The Chief Constable reassured that there is good work being done by the force to better understand and respond to people with mental health needs. Mental health practitioners (two community psychiatric nurses) are available to go on patrol to support the force to provide an improved response. He advised that although he realised there was still more the Constabulary could do, he was satisfied that officers received better information and training to support a general awareness of a range of mental health issues. This enabled them to read reactions, amend their behaviour and deal sensitively with people who presented with mental health issues.

Highpoint Prison

Q: A member of the audience said they live close to prison but felt there was no opportunity to visit the prison.

- 3.15 Tim advised that he is on the Norfolk and Suffolk Criminal Justice Board and the representative on the Board from the prison service is the governor of Highpoint. Tim advised that they have a strong community engagement role within their local community and he was happy to pass on the details to the governor.

Road Traffic Collisions/Speeding

COMMENTS:

- ***Dissatisfaction with the response to a road traffic accident close to the Essex Border. It took an hour to get a Suffolk officer to the incident. Why did the force not work more closely with Cambridgeshire and Essex to ensure a better response time?***

- ***There was a query about the benefits of average speed cameras over Visual Awareness Signs. VAS had to keep being moved otherwise people knew they were there.***

- 3.16 Both Inspector Ferrie and Chief Constable Paxton reassured the audience that the force works closely with both the Essex and Cambridgeshire forces. They advised that the Constabulary would seek to ensure that if someone's safety is at risk, and the home force could not respond quickly, they would attend an incident outside of county. In respect of the main road between Haverhill and Cambridge, Suffolk Constabulary is often the first to arrive to incidents on the border.
- 3.17 The Chief Constable advised that average speed cameras tend to be used as an enforcement tool and are to ensure a balanced speed. SID (Speed Indicator Display) and VAS (Visual Awareness Signs) are more specifically to trigger the conscience and help people to moderate their speed. All those type of devices aim to regulate speed. They are not designed to catch people out but to remind drivers of the speed limit and encourage their speed to reduce to a safer level.
- 3.18 The PCC encouraged that people if they had concerns about speeding, or were interested in setting up a community speedwatch scheme, they should contact their local SNT. He advised that following the speeding survey last year, the Constabulary had amended its policy so its enforcement activity was targeted to accident hot-spots and areas where there were community concerns about speeding. There were plans to use money from Driver Awareness Courses to support more road safety activity.

COMMENT: The force's approach to Road Traffic Accidents seems to centre on the offender with little regard for, or statement required from, the victim. A story was recounted where the victim was not asked for a statement and the policing activity seemed to focus on the offender.

- 3.19 The Chief Constable recognised that this is a very emotive issue. He felt that the police service tries to offer the most scrupulous, fair service it can. It does this by: responding to keep people safe, offering everyone the same opportunity to record their experiences and by appropriately investigating allegations of criminal behaviour. In all cases people should be offered the opportunity to provide their statement.

Crime Data Quality

Q: How robust is Suffolk's crime data?

- 3.20 The PCC advised that he has been reassured at his Accountability and Performance Panel that crime data is recorded effectively. That said, there has been concern at a national level about police data integrity and HMIC is due to inspect Suffolk Constabulary (as part of a national programme of inspections) later this month. The force employs a Crime Registrar who regularly audits crime data and provides a monthly report to senior officers highlighting any deficiencies identified by the audit so swift action can be taken.

The PCC thanked everyone for attending and closed the meeting at 8.01 pm.