

Public Forum, Bridgwater – 19th September 2018
Question and Answers Summary

Q. How often do Police Officers patrol the Cranleigh Gardens area of Bridgwater in response to drug taking? Recent example given by resident of people not being able to play football there due to the amount of needles.

A. The Local Area Commander assured the resident that the police recognise that drugs and Anti-Social Behaviour (ASB) is an issue in the Cranleigh Gardens area of Bridgwater – there have been 44 calls to this area in the past 12 months. The Police are working with partners on the issue and will be enforcing new powers called Public Spaces Protection Orders. The Neighbourhood Team should be back up to full numbers by November which will help meet the challenges. There will be a zero tolerance approach to repeat offenders.

Q. Is there anything local residents can do to work with the police regarding littering in public open spaces?

A. The issue of littering is primarily an issue for the District Council and the resident can be signposted to the appropriate department. The Police do work in partnership with the District Council when littering is on an ASB scale.

Q. What is being done about the drug dealing in the Cranleigh Gardens area of Bridgwater? There is frequently a strong smell of cannabis and when reported to 101 this is not felt to have been taken seriously. Eastern Europeans drinking on park benches at any time of the day and night is also of huge concern as they are littering, smashing bottles and urinating in front of young children playing in the park – this is meant to be a no drinking area.

A. The Police apologised for the unsatisfactory response the resident had received and asked to speak to the resident after the meeting to get full details in order to capture information and also any learning. Residents were assured that everyone would be treated in the same way regardless of language barriers as interpreters are available.

Q. Resident from Taunton has been subjected to ASB for a long time and whilst the local PCSO has been very helpful there has been a lack of response from Beat Managers. There are 3 independent witnesses prepared to give statement but the police have not been to see them. The resident was told that the perpetrators would be arrested for the next offence but nothing has happened. Issues include cars being turned over, tyres slashed and speeding where a young girl was killed a couple of years ago. The resident is suffering from health issues while all this is happening.

A. ACC Cullen apologised for the experience this resident has had of the police and promised to speak to the resident after the meeting to discuss the details. The Beat Manager and Sergeant will take the issues forward. The police need to work with partners regarding ASB issues. The PCC also apologised that the resident felt he had to come to a public meeting in order to get his issues addressed.

Q. Resident was driving through Bridgwater and was pulled over by Police Officers who claimed that the tinted windows on his vehicle were too dark and therefore illegal and must be removed. He was told he could peel the coating off or not drive the vehicle. The resident asked if there was a device that could confirm this before he peeled the coating off and ruined his windows which would create an expense for

him. He was told they did not have the device but he could be issued with a ticket and then go to Bridgwater Police station to have it tested. When the resident arrived at the police station there was no device so the Officer made an appointment to go to his house and when she arrived the device confirmed that his tinted windows were legal. The resident did comment that all the Officers he came into contact with were polite but given comments regarding reducing budgets and limited resources would the Officers time not have been better spent elsewhere? Also they could have unnecessarily cost the resident money.

A. The police apologised for this experience and commented that this did sound like a disproportionate amount of resources were being taken up. ACC Cullen offered to take details following the meeting to ensure learning can be captured and will ask the Officers involved for their account of what happened.

Q. Resident of St John's Road in Burnham-on-Sea is a member of the Neighbourhood Watch and wanted to thank the police for their efficient response to a drug problem in her road. A lot of work needed to be done to get reports from other neighbours. Much of the communication with the police was via email which was preferable to the resident due to personal time restraints.

A. The Chief Inspector will ensure that these positive comments are fed back to the relevant team.

Q. What is the Channel Programme mentioned in the Somerset Plan?

A. Government Contest Strategy designed to counter terrorism and a key part of the Prevent strand looks at identifying those who might be vulnerable to suggestions and manipulation. This looks at diverting those vulnerable people away through a multi-agency risk based approach.

Q. What is being done about speeding and aggressive driving in Bridgwater Town Centre? Resident would like to get involved in Speed Watch.

A. Invested in 9 mobile speed vans and 6 speed bikes. The Road Safety Team can get involved in supporting local speed enforcement activity.

Q. Resident waited 45 minutes for the call to be answered last time he rang 101.

A. Additional funding has been put into the 101 service which needs to provide a good serve in the face of reduced Officer numbers. The PCC commented that the average wait time is currently 6-8 minutes so please provide any details to her of long waits so that this can be investigated. The PCC also commented on the number of persistent callers and non-police related calls that are being taken on the 101 number which stop genuine calls getting through.

Q. Resident is concerned that the extra £1 per month the PCC will be asking for again as part of the Council Tax Precept is a problem for some families on low incomes. Why does the PCC not make the contribution to policing voluntary?

A. It would be against legislation to make the contribution voluntary. The PCC does not take the decision lightly to ask for the extra £1 per month on the Council Tax Precept for an average Band D property. The PCC regularly meets those struggling on low incomes. The PCC and her team are currently consulting with the public regarding the rise in the Council Tax Precept for next year. People want more police and there is no additional money coming from central government to pay for it.

Q. How hard does the PCC lobby the government for increased police funding from central government?

A. The PCC meets fellow PCCs and Ministers a couple of times a month and this is frequently discuss. Also the PCC made the point that Avon and Somerset Police have not just been subjected to the funding reductions as a result of austerity measures it has also been receiving less from central government than it is assessed to need per head of population since 2007/08 due to an unfair adjustment to the funding formula – government keep promising to review this.

Q. Resident thanked the police for their support regarding vulnerable families but is concerned that other agencies responsible did not provide the required support and this is only going to get worse with further cuts to Local Authority funding. How are the Local Authorities working with the Police regarding the impact that cuts to their services are going to have on police resources?

A. The PCC meets Local Authority Leaders on a regular basis. There are real concerns regarding further cuts to Local Authority budgets and the expectation from government that this can be made up from charging an increase in business rates from the already struggling high streets. The PCC suggested that concerned residents may want to contact their MPs. The police seem to now be the first and last resort for residents seeking help for any number of issues. The Police will be working with Local Authorities so that they know where the cuts are going to be made and which of the most vulnerable will be impacted the most.

Q. Why no reduction in the foreign aid budget with so many funding reductions required here?

A. This a government decision and not for PCCs.

Q. Can you explain the term Cuckooing?

A. Refers to a County lines drug gangs issue. Gangs who operate from metropolitan areas will take over a county drug market and will target vulnerable individuals to use their address, money etc. This requires a sophisticated response and a great deal of work to disrupt the gangs but protect vulnerable individuals. Some excellent work is being done in the force area which cannot be discussed. There is now a dedicated resource in Sedgemoor – Serious and Organised Crime Officer to identify vulnerable groups and stop them being targeted. The police urge anyone who is worried about these issues and has seen anything to report it to the police or anonymously through Crimestoppers as the intelligence is important.

Q. What will the working patterns of the PCSOs in villages be – will they be available when working people are at home?

A. They will be working 7 days per week all day and into the late evening. Residents should let the police know if they have any suggestions for improving engagement with their Neighbourhood Policing Teams.