

Bristol Public Forum - 12th March 2019

Question and Answer Summary

Q: Following the murder of Bijan Ebrahimi, do the police and the Council believe they are now on top of the situation? From social media it would appear that there are still some vulnerable people in that area, are they getting the support they need? Second question, currently setting up a road safety partnership in the community consisting of 2 – 3 small groups, endeavoured today to try to talk to the local team but the Constabulary website was down, although the team are involved – any support for this?

A: The PCC confirmed that Bristol City Council, the Constabulary and her office were working together and building on the lessons learned from the tragedy of Bijan Ebrahimi and advised that even earlier today herself and Cllr Asher Craig had exchanged e-mails regarding a vulnerable person. The devastating case of Bijan Ebrahimi will be scarred on hearts forever.

In terms of the road safety team, the local commander advised the constabulary can definitely support local Community Speed Watch schemes, there are 100's of residents in Avon & Somerset involved in these and there are a number of experts within the Constabulary who can help sort this out quickly, there are dedicated specials and PCSOs to help with the scheme.

Q: As a member of a political party who would legalise and tax drugs and having seen a lot of drug use in cities, the difference in Bristol is the change in young people's attitudes, blatantly taking drugs in clubs and with no fear of being caught – what are your thoughts? Is there a better way?

A: The PCC believes it is better to keep young people out of the criminal system where possible as once labelled as a criminal it is a slippery slope and that the Drugs Education Programme is designed to give them an opportunity to learn and change in much the same way as speed awareness courses do for drivers. The PCC has had a conversation with the City Council regarding heroin assisted treatment rooms and exploring these – treating patients under the NHS is very expensive at around £40,000 per patient. The PCC has not been persuaded yet about drug consumption rooms and the Home Office do not permit them, the PCC knows the impact of drug addiction on individuals and their family and would not wish it on anyone.

The chief constable shares the concerns about the harm that the drug trade does – he agrees we are not winning the war. He advised that A&S are a progressive force in dealing with drug education and not criminalising young people immediately, which hopefully will help them to make better choices and if they continue to carry on they will be safer. A&S were the first to use a charity to test drugs at a festival to help people stay safer. The police have met some very troubled people, cannabis seems to find a way to attract/harm people with mental ill health and there are fears any relaxation would create a black market. As the international policing lead the chief is aware of a lot of experimental approaches to tackling the harm caused by drugs but there is no silver bullet.

The local commander noted the change over the years in the criminality they've been dealing with; years ago he would have been arresting people for cannabis use, now the police are fighting against sophisticated, violent drug dealing and only enforcement will work in these situations.

Q: As someone who has suffered the loss of a family member due to knife crime and understanding the affect it has, interested to hear more about the preventative work – could you explain the methodology and approach?

A: The chief constable acknowledged the misery caused to families by knife crime and the harm to the community. In A&S police are going to be intervening early in children's lives, from as young as 4/5 years old. In particular there is work going into working with children with ACE (Adverse Childhood Experiences), everyone deserves a second chance.

The local chief inspector agreed that knife crime is manifesting across the country and too many beautiful children are being lost as a result. Whilst the police continue to 'fight the fires' there has been a step change in Bristol East recently where the community got together with proactivity and working with local schools to educate children about safe choices. The police have also undertaken mystery shops to check young people are not being sold knives, worked with youth clubs to engage with young people. There is a project that has identified people with lived experiences of these crimes to coach and work with a group of young people found to be at risk. It's a multi-agency scheme undertaken by Bristol College, Golden Key and other partners.

Q: Is there anything that can be done about gangs and how many are there in Bristol? There was a lovely girl stabbed in the park and this has been reported as a gang initiation?

A: The chief constable advised that the County Lines drug dealing – where the big man in London sends young people to an area to deal drugs – has been responsible for a number of the murders in Bristol, where they are fighting over their territories. Outside of Bristol there are 32 County Lines in Avon and Somerset selling drugs and as a result there have been murders/stabbings forcewide.

The local chief inspector advised that Bristol City is divided by the motorway and this divides the gang network. There are 260 gang affiliated young people in Bristol. The young girl stabbed last week is tragic and highlights the need to educate young people that carrying a knife is a bad choice. The police are trying to reach the 260 young people to protect them.

The local commander explained the term 'cuckooing', which is when drug dealers identify a vulnerable person, befriend them and take over their house and operate their drugs trade from there. There has been an increase in this behaviour in Bristol, acknowledged it's a very complex landscape and the police are working hard through intelligence received and with partners to keep up with the diversification.

Q: It seems the major problem is drugs and weapons are related to drugs. Why can't there be tougher rules to stop drugs coming into the country?

The PCC commented that the Border Agencies do phenomenal work and work closely with the Regional Organised Crime Unit, but noted that we are an island – and it's likely the drugs sneak in elsewhere, not through Dover. We're not winning the war so it is important to work with young people to persuade them to make wiser choices – whether it is drugs or human trafficking the 'big guys' always exploit vulnerable people to make their money. It should be noted the Border Agencies have also experienced cuts throughout the austerity.

The chief constable agreed that most drugs do not come through the airports, there are millions of containers coming into the country and only a tiny number are checked. Also a significant number of

modern drugs are chemically manufactured and cannabis now is very strong, it is easy to grow £5k worth of cannabis in your airing cupboard in 5 weeks. The police do not have the enforcement capability so focus on the cuckooing as this causes the most harm and causes the chief the most concern. The new Operation Remedy work will be targeted, proactive enforcement.

Q: There used to be a good unit dedicated to tackling graffiti, who carried out good, constructive, preventative work. Now the focus seems to be on painting it out and not tracking down and dealing with the offenders?

A: The local commander advised that the unit had to be disbanded and agreed there needs to be an easy way for residents to report new graffiti and the plan is to have an online portal where photos can be uploaded, so that when prolific 'taggers' are caught the evidence is there. Bristol Waste are supporting efforts to deal with graffiti and residents can get free paint to paint over it. The commander offered to introduce the resident to the group that are prosecuting the prolific graffiti taggers that are causing harm and leaving residents feeling unsafe if that would be helpful.

Q: Thank you for the good work with the bike community so far – there is a lot of intelligence on social media, do the police want this passed on? Believes there are connections to County Lines – does A&S monitor this?

A: The chief constable advised that where the police are investigating crime/gangs they will build up a profile of evidence and this will include social media but there is no routine scanning of social media. The community in this instance become the eyes and ears for the police and the intel sharing is invaluable. It's proven to be a great partnership with a 70% drop in bike crime.

Q: Having seen on fly-on-the-wall TV shows the amount of time police spend in night clubs dealing with revellers and how licensing hours have changed, concerned that there are less officers on duty during the day as need to be on duty at night – is that the case?

A: The PCC advised that the licensing hours are the responsibility of the City Council – the police may object to renewals but ultimately it will be for the City Council to decide. Problem venues do create extra work for officers in Bristol on a Friday/Saturday night and extra officers are on duty but it doesn't affect the number of officers on duty in the day. The PCC thinks that venues should have to contribute to the cost associated with these extra officers and as such has spoken to the Council about a night time levy, which they have not implemented. However, some of the bars do pay into the Bristol BID process.

The local commander advised that a new partnership has launched – the Night Time Economy Board and on the whole the City has good, ethical, well-run premises and it is just a small number that cause issues. The Board meets fortnightly to manage the new scheme which sees Bristol BID paying for extra SIA qualified bouncers patrolling to manage for example the unplanned stag parties. The police are working hard with partners to improve the offer to City visitors. Through engagement the number of incidents has reduced by 1/3 and the number of officers required has reduced. There is some concern about the late licences for a couple of isolated venues. A&S has a good record for collaborating to call to review and close troublesome venues.